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Kuwaiti FM arrives Tuesday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah is expected to arrive Tuesday to offer congratulations to His Majesty King Hussein on his recovery, an official said Saturday. "In his first official visit to Jordan since 1990, Sheikh Sabah is also expected to discuss with King Hussein and senior officials bilateral relations and means of improving them," the source told the Jordan Times. Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Kharib is due to visit Kuwait before the end of the month.

'Arafat to meet Clinton in February'

SHARM AL SHEIKH (AP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will meet U.S. President Bill Clinton on Feb. 4 in Washington, Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said Saturday. Shaath gave no details, but the meeting will most probably focus on the implementation of the U.S.-brokered Wye River peace agreement, which has been stalled since December when Israel refused to proceed with a scheduled withdrawal of troops from the West Bank. Shaath spoke to reporters after talks between Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm El Sheikh. The two leaders discussed the stalled peace process and the "settlement explosion" in Jerusalem, Shaath said, referring to Israeli building and occupying houses in the traditionally Arab part of the city. Neither Arafat nor Mubarak spoke to reporters after their meeting. Arafat later arrived back in the Gaza Strip.

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Kuwait on agenda for meeting of Iraqi MPs

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Kuwait will figure high on the agenda of an extraordinary meeting of the Iraqi parliament Tuesday, its speaker, Saadun Hammadi, said. "The Kuwait government has taken part in the U.S.-British aggression against Iraq by allowing their forces to use its territory... and paying towards its costs," Hammadi said. "It's the right of the representatives of the Iraqi people gathered in the National Assembly to discuss this issue — it's an expression of democracy and a legitimate right," he told the official news agency INA. In its last extraordinary meeting on Jan. 10, the parliament urged Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to no longer recognise "unjust" U.N. resolutions.

Bus crash kills 12 people in Egypt

CAIRO (AP) — A bus collided head on with a truck north of Cairo on Saturday, killing 12 people and seriously wounding 13 others, police officials said. The crash occurred as the two vehicles were speeding towards each other along a highway near the town of Qoutou, Gharbiya province, some 90 kilometres north of Cairo, the officials said. The injured were admitted to the Qoutou and Tanta general hospitals, the officials added, speaking on condition of anonymity. The truck driver has been arrested and police said they would arrest the bus driver once he has left hospital.

Greek students still on strike after talks

ATHENS (AP) — The government failed to break the deadlock over disruptive two-month protests at high schools Saturday despite giving into demands for face-to-face talks with the teenage demonstrators. Little progress was reported after an eight-hour meeting between Education Minister Gerassimos Arsenis and about 40 student representatives. High school students are expected to continue their protests, staging street rallies and daily blockades of busy roads as well as continuing the occupation of hundreds of school buildings. Thousands of children in their last two years of schooling have missed most of the winter semester as a result of the protests.

Trimble set to halt N. Ireland peace process

BELFAST (AFP) — Northern Ireland's First Minister David Trimble said Saturday he was ready to suspend the British province's peace process if paramilitary groups keep refusing to park the process for a while so as to tackle the obstacles created by the paramilitaries, well and good," Trimble said on BBC Ulster Radio. Trimble, who also leads the Ulster Unionist Party, is refusing to form a government unless paramilitary groups, notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA), begin to turn in their weapons.

Five Pakistanis killed by gunman

MULTAN (R) — Five minority Shiite Muslims were killed by a gunman on a motorcycle in a village in Pakistan's Punjab province on Saturday, police said. They said one of two men on the motorcycle opened fire at Shiite cleric Pir Sabir Sultan Shah and four disciples in Mirak Sial, a village about 100 km northeast of the southern Punjab city of Multan. Four men died instantly and a fifth later in hospital.

Iraq to seek 'fair' decision on U.N. sanctions at Arab FM's meeting

'Kuwait will attend Arab summit with Baghdad'

CAIRO (AFP) — Iraq expects Arab foreign ministers to condemn last month's U.S.-British air strikes and to reach a "fair" decision on lifting U.N. sanctions at their meeting here Sunday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf said.

"The minimum required is a condemnation of the American-British aggression and the adoption by the Arabs of a fair position on the lifting of eight years of sanctions," Sahhaf told reporters following a meeting with Arab League chief Esmat Abdul Meguid.

"We believe the Arabs should support us because international responsibility for the fierce aggression falls on those who carried it out — the Americans and the British and the other parties who took part with them," he said.

Sahhaf also said that Baghdad wanted "Arab countries to help Iraq to resolve outstanding questions with the U.N. Security Council" and expected "compensation" for the Dec. 16-20 air strikes by the United States and Britain for Iraq's alleged refusal to cooperate with U.N. arms inspectors.

The Iraqi foreign minister said he briefed Abdul Meguid on "the Iraqi point of view and the acceptable minimum" that Baghdad expects from the meeting of foreign ministers at Arab League headquarters here Sunday.

Asked what he expected from the meeting, Sahhaf said: "We don't yet know what the final results of the meeting will be. We are cooperating with efforts to reach an acceptable solution." Abdul Meguid held a series of informal consultations Saturday with a number of foreign ministers ahead of Sunday's meeting in an attempt to find a "common Arab attitude."

He was due to discuss with them a draft resolution already hammered out at two meetings earlier this month in Egypt by the foreign ministers of Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

The resolution appeals to the U.N. Security Council to lift the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people in 1990, but also calls on Baghdad to respect Security Council resolutions and the sovereignty of Kuwait and its frontiers, an Arab League official said.

It also explicitly condemns December's U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq, and "rejects all military action undertaken without a mandate from the Security Council."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa held talks with Sahhaf and outlined four principles on which "all Arab countries agree."

They are Iraq's territorial integrity, the need to relieve the sufferings of the Iraqi people, non-interference in the country's internal affairs and the need to find political solutions to the Iraq issue, he said.

Sunday's foreign ministers' meeting was originally called at the request of Yemen in the immediate aftermath of the U.S.-British air raids against Iraq to discuss convening a full Arab summit dedicated to the Iraq crisis.

Most of the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, have so far refused to take part in any summit attended by Iraq. However, Yemen's Foreign Minister Abdul Qader Bajamal was upbeat after meeting Abdul Meguid. He told journalists his country wanted to convince other Arab states to participate in a "summit dedicated to the Arab world's present issues and aimed at restoring Arab unity."



Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf and Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid leave a joint meeting Saturday in Cairo (AFP photo)

unity."

He said he and Abdul Meguid had arrived at "a common vision of ways to work during Sunday's meeting," and predicted it would be successful.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Sharara, who is to chair Sunday's meeting, speaking to journalists before meeting Abdul Meguid, also stressed the importance of restoring "lost Arab solidarity."

In spite of the reservations of other Gulf states, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al

Ahmed Al Sabah insisted Saturday as he arrived here for the ministerial meeting that his country was prepared to take part in an Arab summit attended by Baghdad.

"Kuwait has never been an obstacle to the holding of a summit and it is an agreement on such a summit Kuwait will participate whether Iraq attends or not," Sheikh Sabah said.

Nevertheless, he hit back at

Iraqi claims that it was Kuwait and not Baghdad that now posed the main threat to Gulf security.

"As far as Kuwait is concerned, the victim is being turned into the criminal and the murderer is being passed off as an innocent," Sheikh Sabah said.

"Iraqi attacks are aimed not just at Kuwait but at the whole of the Arab World — that's why the whole Arab World must defend itself," he said.

Iraq, Kuwait dismiss reports of Iraqi troop buildup on border

Agencies

IRAQ'S FOREIGN Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf denied on Saturday that Baghdad was massing troops along its borders with Gulf neighbours.

"There is no military build-up on the Kuwait and Saudi border and these reports are lies," he told reporters in Cairo, where he is due to attend an Arab League meeting on Sunday.

The official Iraqi news agency INA, in a dispatch monitored in Baghdad, quoted Sahhaf as calling the reports of a build-up "American nonsense."

Also on Saturday, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah dismissed reports that Iraq was massing troops at the border, the official KUNA news agency said.

"Our reports indicate that there is no Iraqi massing of troops on the Kuwaiti borders beyond the normal level," he said in a statement as he left for the ministerial meeting in Cairo.

"We are always exercising caution and alertness concerning any rumours in this regard," he added.

The Iran-based Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an

Iraqi opposition group, said Friday that Baghdad was massing troops and missiles near its southern borders.

It said there was a major deployment of surface-to-air and Scud missiles, an army brigade, Republican Guard and Baath Party units and other security forces to southern areas.

Officers and other sources had told Reuters in Kuwait that Iraq had moved military hardware and troops into its south in recent weeks, apparently to quell internal Muslim Shi'ite opposition and intimidate neighbouring Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

On Friday, a United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission official in Kuwait said there were no unusual Iraqi troop movements near the southern border with Kuwait. On Saturday, Kuwait's foreign minister said Iraqi military reinforcements in the south were normal.

Iraq this week blasted Kuwait for allowing its bases to be used during raids on Iraq in December, when U.S. and British planes mounted their biggest offensive since the 1991 Gulf war, which ended a seven-month Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

Netanyahu fires Mordechai as defence minister

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai on Saturday, finalising the rupture ahead of May elections.

Netanyahu immediately said he had asked former Defence Minister Moshe Arens, an elder statesman who had been leading an internal revolt against the prime minister inside the governing Likud Party, to return to the post.

Arens, 73, said he would reply to the offer only next week.

The dramatic moves came a day after Mordechai, considered the most moderate and popular member of Netanyahu's right-wing government, broke with the Likud to join a new centrist party for the May elections.

At a meeting of Likud leaders which he opened to the press at the last minute, Netanyahu announced that he had sent Mordechai a dismissal letter earlier in the day. The dismissal will take effect in 48 hours.



Yitzhak Mordechai

In a stinging attack on his former associate, Netanyahu said Mordechai defected from Likud only because he could not obtain a guarantee that he would be reappointed defence minister in a future Netanyahu government.

"In the last few weeks I realised that your personal ambition is stronger than any other consideration," Netanyahu said, reading his letter to Mordechai.

"You wanted a guaranteed place as minister of defence but I couldn't

guarantee this because you doubted the ideology of the Likud," he said, referring to criticism by Mordechai of the government's hardline stance in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Mordechai, a stocky former general known for his common touch with the public, fired back, saying Netanyahu's letter "is full of lies and inconsistencies."

"Netanyahu is not worthy of my confidence and respect and I don't think he merits the confidence of the Israeli people," Mordechai said in a televised interview.

"The people of Israel deserve better leadership and I intend, with my friends, to offer a different leadership," he said.

Mordechai was speaking from his home near Jerusalem in the company of former army chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and other figures who are creating a centrist party to run candidates for parliament and prime minister.

His remarks were the first public confirmation

that he will be joining the centrist grouping, most likely as its prime ministerial candidate.

Mordechai's defection from Likud is the severest blow yet to Netanyahu's reelection hopes.

A number of veteran Likud figures have already broken with Netanyahu, two of them — former Finance Minister Dan Meridor and ex-Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo — joining forces with Lipkin-Shahak and now Mordechai.

But none of them have the popularity and potential voter appeal of Mordechai, who immigrated from Iraq as a child and rose to become a highly decorated general and successful politician.

Other Likud figures are challenging Netanyahu for the party leadership, although it was not immediately clear if Netanyahu's bid to reappoint Arens as defence minister would quell the revolt.

Mordechai joined the Likud Party just months before the last elections in May 1996 and his role as a

constant campaign companion alongside Netanyahu was credited with bringing victory against Labour incumbent Shimon Peres.

It was far from clear if Mordechai can be as successful in trying to topple Netanyahu as he was in aiding his election.

Opinion polls indicate the likeliest scenario in the direct election for prime minister will see Mordechai eliminated in a first round, leaving Netanyahu and Labour Party leader Ehud Barak in a run-off.

But the new centrist party could make a strong showing in the parallel parliamentary vote, giving it a major role in forming the next government.

Barak lost no time in calling on Mordechai to join forces to defeat Netanyahu.

"Mordechai is joining a group of wonderful leaders who all reached the conclusion that Netanyahu is destroying the country," he said.

"We [Labour and Centre] will bring a real change to the country," he said.

U.S. warplanes bomb missile sites in southern Iraq

WASHINGTON (AP) — American warplanes patrolling the "no-fly" zone over southern Iraq bombed two surface-to-air missile installations Saturday after encountering Iraqi MiGs "darting in and out" of the off-limits airspace, U.S. officials said.

The two American F-14 Tomcats and two F/A-18 Hornets returned safely to the USS Carl Vinson in the Gulf, according to the U.S. Central Command outside Tampa, Florida, and the Pentagon.

Iraqi officials in Baghdad had no immediate comment.

The bombings, the latest in a string of clashes, occurred at 0615 GMT when American planes on routine patrol detected two Iraqi warplanes "darting in and out" of the restricted airspace over southern Iraq, a U.S. official said.

The Americans "responded to a threat initiated by two Iraqi MiG-21s flying south of 33rd Parallel in Iraq and ground fire from anti-aircraft artillery," said Lt. Col. Mike Milord, a Pentagon spokesman.

The American planes dropped laser-guided bombs on two Iraqi surface-to-air missile systems. A damage assessment of the sites was still under way, a U.S. official said Saturday.

In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Capt. Michael Shavers, a spokesman for Operation Southern Watch, told The Associated Press in a phone interview that there were two "incidents" Saturday morning in the

southern no-fly zone.

There was "no air-to-air engagement" between the Iraqi planes and the U.S. planes that observed them, Shavers said.

Shavers declined to say what Iraqi action provoked the attack. He said each of the four American planes dropped a precision-guided bomb on the Iraqi air-defence site.

At the White House, National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said Saturday's clash would not alter U.S. resolve to enforce the flight-interdiction zones that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein agreed to at the end of the 1991 Gulf War, which followed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The northern no-fly zone was set up in 1991 north of the 36th Parallel to keep Saddam from attacking Kurds with his aircraft. The southern zone was set up in 1992 to protect southern Shiite Muslims, and prohibit attacks against Iraq's southern neighbours.

Since U.S. and British air attacks against Iraq in mid-December, U.S. warplanes have attacked several installations after U.S. officials said they were challenged by Iraqi forces in the no-fly zones.

The U.S. and British air strikes on Dec. 16-19 targeted Iraqi military and communications centres after U.N. arms inspectors accused Baghdad of obstructing their efforts to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as required by U.N. resolutions that ended the 1991 Gulf War.

Israeli shelling damages homes, cuts power in Lebanon

RASHAYA (AFP) — Ten homes were damaged and power was cut in four villages in southeastern Lebanon Saturday after Israeli shelled the area following attacks on its positions by Hizbollah guerrillas, police said.

The heavy bombardment of the western Bekaa damaged 10 houses in Zillaya, but no casualties were reported, the police said.

Shells also fell on a power line in Zillaya, cutting electricity supply in

the village and nearby Qilya, Dallafa and Yohmor, they said.

The shelling came after a series of attacks by guerrillas of the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of the Shiite Hizbollah, on the Israeli-occu-

pied border zone in southern Lebanon.

The guerrillas fired rockets and machineguns on positions manned by Israeli troops and their allied South Lebanon Army militia in Zimraya, Ain Qinya, Kawkaba and

Abu Qamha, a Hizbollah spokesman told AFP.

There were no reports of casualties from the guerrilla attacks.

Hizbollah spearheads efforts to end Israel's 20-year occupation of southern Lebanon.

Saddam: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait aiding United States in weakening Arabs

BAGHDAD (AP) — President Saddam Hussein has accused Saudi Arabia and Kuwait of flooding the global oil market, leading to the impoverishment of other Arab countries and the enrichment of the United States.

In a rare front-page newspaper editorial published Saturday, Saddam accused the rulers of the two countries of being more concerned about their "chair" than their people.

"Saudi rulers have caused great calamities to the Arab nation and committed aggression on its right since they became a bridge for the foreigner," Saddam wrote in the government's Al Jumhuriya newspaper.

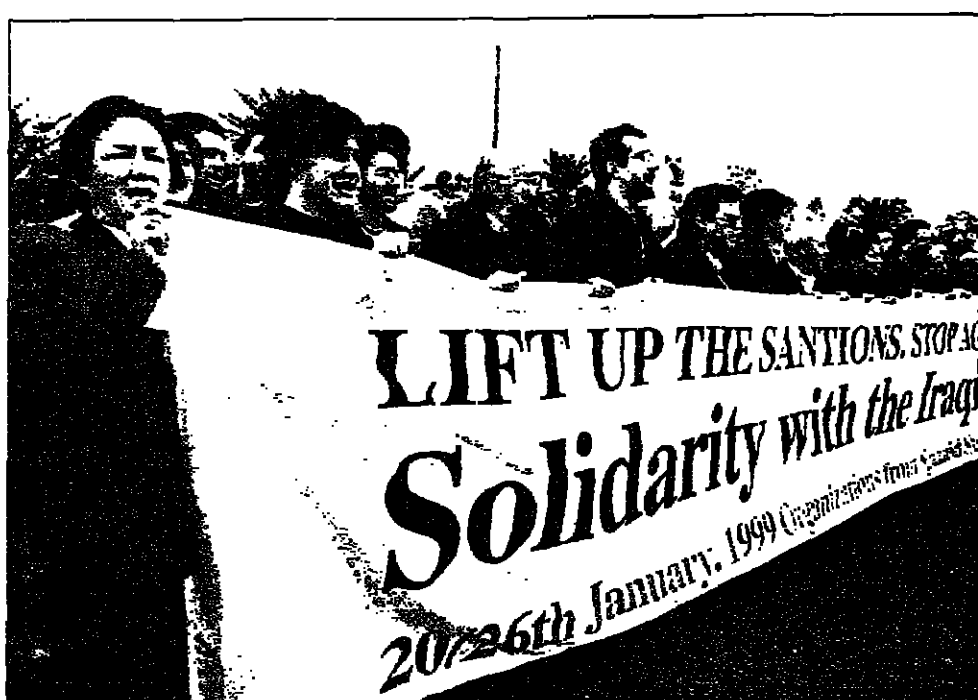
He wrote that the United States has built up a huge stock of oil by buying cheaply, and is in a position to sell it at a profit when the prices go up. The United States has often used its inventory to influence the oil markets.

"It is America, to a large extent, which controls the price of oil throughout the world and not laws of supply and demand," Saddam wrote.

Oil prices are now at a record low, a barrel selling around \$10, down from about \$20 a year ago. Efforts by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) have failed to halt the free fall.

Saddam wrote he does not see any solution to the global oil crisis until there is drastic change in policy in the two countries.

He said Kuwait and Saudi Arabia exerted pressure on OPEC members to lift their production ceiling "which led to the collapse of oil prices... inflicting great damage on the interests of member countries including those of the Saudi people." The two countries have handed "America, and



Spanish demonstrators protest outside the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad Saturday to protest United Nations sanctions against Iraq. A 129-member Spanish delegation of trade unionists, NGOs and others is currently in Baghdad demanding the sanctions be lifted. They will leave Iraq on Monday (AP photo)

Zionism knives to pierce the Arab Nation with," he said.

Asia's economic crisis and unseasonably warm fall in 1998 cut demand for oil, causing a glut in the market after OPEC had already increased output. OPEC controls 40 per cent of the world's daily oil production.

The crisis has hit Iraq hard. The United Nations currently allows Iraq to sell oil worth not more than \$5.2 billion every six months for buying essential goods.

But low oil prices have prevented Iraq from reaching the U.N. ceiling. Its run-down oil industry could hardly make \$3 billion during the past six-month period that ended in November though the country kept pumping at its maximum limit of about 2.5 million barrels a day.

It is the second time in less than a month that Saddam has unleashed criticism against the two Arab Gulf states.

Early this month, he exhorted Arabs to rise up against the rulers who did not denounce the mid-December U.S.-British air strikes on Iraq.

The bombing was to punish Iraq after U.N. weapons inspectors said that Baghdad was blocking their work. The arms monitors are charged with eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Until that happens, the Security Council cannot lift trade sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990 after its invasion of Kuwait.

Iraq has hardened its position against the United Nations since the air strikes and demands an unconditional lifting of sanctions. It also refuses to let the inspectors resume work in Iraq.

But mindful of the hardships caused by the sanctions, the Security Council is discussing several proposals to end the impasse amid U.S. demands that the mission to remove Iraq's illegal weapons should not be compromised.

The issue will also be discussed at a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on Sunday. Iraq's Mohammad Said Sahhaf is attending.

But Iraq's most influential newspaper, Babel, said not much should be expected from the meeting.

The conference "is born dead because there are parties who undermined it before its start," Babel, published by Saddam's son Qudsai, said in a front-page editorial.

On Thursday, Al Sahhaf accused the United States of manipulating Arab leaders to ensure that the Cairo conference does not support Iraq.

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Iraqi leaders had miraculous escape from U.S. missile attack — Aziz

BEIRUT (AFP) — Iraqi leaders had a miraculous escape during last month's U.S. raids on Baghdad when a missile struck the foreign ministry but failed to explode, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said in remarks published Saturday.

"They struck the headquarters of the foreign ministry while we were holding a meeting — Vice President

Taha Yassin Ramadan, Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf and myself — but luckily the missile did not explode," Aziz said in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper Al Nahar.

"The attack was aimed at killing us as leaders of the state," he said.

Aziz also charged that the December 16-20 U.S.-British raids had targeted "the command headquarters of President Saddam Hussein and the National Assembly," the Iraqi parliament.

Aziz remarks were the first official Iraqi admission that the ministry of foreign affairs or parliament had been struck.

According to the Iraqi authorities, the U.S.-British raids, carried out for Iraq's refusal to cooperate with U.N. arms inspectors, killed 62 soldiers and 73 civilians. The United States has said the raids killed between 600 and 1,600 members of the armed forces as well as a number of unidentified high-ranking members of the Iraqi government.

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U.S. still hostile — Iran

TEHRAN (R) — Iran on Saturday accused the United States of maintaining a policy of hostility towards it and said there had been no improvement in bilateral relations.

"Because there has been no practical change in America's behaviour towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, no change has taken place in relations between the two countries," the official news agency IRNA quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi as saying.

"Despite certain positive remarks by American

officials, there is a contradiction [between their words and] their actions," Asefi said.

He was commenting on recent remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who said Washington was prepared for an authorised and acknowledged dialogue with Tehran, long its arch-enemy.

Relations have thawed slightly since moderate President Mohammad Khatami called for increased people-to-people exchanges a year ago.

But supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who

outranks Khatami, has ruled out talks with the United States — or resumption of diplomatic relations.

Iranian officials said any improvements in the United States — Iran relations are impossible as long as the United States maintains hostile policies against Iran, such as economic and investment sanctions.

Washington broke diplomatic relations after the 1979 Islamic revolution when Islamist students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran. They held 52 Americans hostage for more than a year.

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officials, there is a contradiction [between their words and] their actions," Asefi said.

He was commenting on recent remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who said Washington was prepared for an authorised and acknowledged dialogue with Tehran, long its arch-enemy.

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At least 20 killed in tribal clashes in Sudan

KHARTOUM (AP) — At least 20 people were killed in clashes between Arab and African tribesmen in a town near the Sudanese border with Chad, a newspaper reported Saturday.

The tribes fought Tuesday over grazing lands near

Geneina, about 1,100 kilometres west of the capital, Khartoum, the Al Rai Al Amn newspaper reported. The town is in the western province of northern Darfur.

Two senior tribal officials and a local official belonging to the ruling National Congress Party were killed, the newspaper said.

Interior Minister Brig. Abdul Raheem Mohammad Hussein and Defence Minister Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Sulaiman met with officials in the area in a bid to reduce tensions, it added.

Northern Darfur has a large Arab and African tribal population. Clashes between nomadic Arab tribesmen and the mainly agrarian Africans over dwindling plots of arable land are not uncommon during droughts.

The clashes grew increasingly violent in the 1980s with the spread of firearms from Chad and areas of the south where rebels are fighting the government.

Sudan is studying ceasefire extension

KHARTOUM (R) — Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mustafa Osman Ismail said on Saturday Sudan was studying whether to extend a ceasefire in its war with rebels.

Ismail said in a statement Sudan would discuss extending the cease-fire in the Bahr Al Ghazal and Northern Upper Nile areas in talks soon with a delegation related to the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

"This issue is one of the articles to be studied during the visit to Sudan which the joint ministerial team of the friends of IGAD will undertake from Jan. 23 to Jan. 26," he said.

IGAD is a group of African states which has mediated between the Khartoum Islamist government and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels to try to end the 15-year civil war.

Ismail restated Sudan's calls for a "comprehensive ceasefire to alleviate the suffering of the citizens who are affected by war and to create the atmosphere conducive to peace."

United Nations officials have been trying to persuade the warring parties in southern Sudan to extend the ceasefire they say is crucial to keeping thousands of people alive.

Sudan rebel leader John Garang said in Cairo last week that rebels would extend the ceasefire if it would help relief work.

Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes when fighting erupted in Bahr Al Ghazal last year and the disruption of agriculture sparked a famine which killed thousands.

The government and the SPLA declared a three-month cease-fire in July.

Palestinians to get country code for phone calls

By William A. Orme Jr.

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — In a step toward virtual statehood, Palestinians are about to be granted a form of long-distance independence: their own country code for international telephone calls.

Over Israeli objections, the International Telecommunications Union quietly announced this month that area code 970 had been reserved for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) territory in the West Bank and Gaza. The union, a U.N. affiliate in Geneva, agreed in principle to give the Palestinians a code at its membership meeting in November.

"We saw this as a very important decision for us," Imad Falouji, telecommunications minister for the PNA, said when he received word of

the decision this week. "It meant that all of these countries are supporting us."

Before the agency formally assigns the code and it is put into use, the Palestinians have to meet additional legal and technical requirements. Those include installing new switching systems and rerouting local telephone numbers. Falouji said that could be done in two or three months.



Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammed Saleh Hourani (second left) with Canadian Minister of Industry John Manley (far right) (Pera photo)

Telecom industry can be basis for economic cooperation between Jordan, Canada

By Hind-Lara Mango

AMMAN — Canadian Minister of Industry John Manley paid a two-day working visit to the Kingdom where he met with Jordanian counterparts and officials in the fields of telecommunications, industry, and public works.

"The Jordanian and Canadian governments enjoy quite an active relationship in telecommunications particularly in the regulatory area," Manley told the Jordan Times Saturday.

He said: "The Canadian experience in telecommunications can be offered on the basis of structure and framework as the world moves from a regulated monopoly in telecommunications to a competitive environment."

Some Canadian regulatory models are already being used in Jordan's new regulatory system, and the Canadian government has assisted in providing some of the legal background for the new telecommunications regulatory structures that are being put in place.

"We can offer useful experience to Jordan as [Canada has also] tried to bring advanced telecommunications infrastructure to parts of Canada that are remote, that have low levels of service, and are difficult to reach," said the minister.

Manley is responsible for his country's telecommunications policy, and has led the development of Canada's Information Highway Strategy not only in traditional hard-wired telecommunications, but also in wireless and satellite telecommunications.

Canada is the first country in the world to have a domestic satellite system.

Over the last ten years Jordan has received approximately \$40 million in bilateral assistance from the Canadian government, the largest

chunk of which has been invested in what is considered to be a pioneer study of oil and gas potentials in the Kingdom.

This year, Canada has allocated its annual budget of \$3 billion to Jordan.

Discussions with the Minister of Public Works and Housing and Transport Naser Lawzi focused on investment opportunities for Canadian firms in restructuring and privatisation projects currently under way in the kingdom.

"There are some Canadian firms such as S.N.C. Lavalin and Bombardier, which are interested in participating and investing in projects anticipated by the Jordanian government," the minister said.

In addition, Canada and Jordan are negotiating a bilateral foreign investment protection agreement and a double taxation treaty. "Both of these agreements have been under discussion for a period of time and are close to being completed," Manley said.

The investment protection agreement essentially aims to ensure that both countries agree to treat each other's companies in a manner equivalent to domestic companies.

"Most of the hurdles have been overcome in this respect and our hope is that they will be ready to sign early this year," the minister said.

Annual Canadian export values over the past five years have averaged \$10 million with Jordan. The current balance of trade tilts in Canada's favour with Canadian exports to the Kingdom amounting to \$10 million (compared to \$30 million in 1996) against a total of \$500,000 million in imports from Jordan.

"There is a lot of room for growth," Manley said. "Discussions have been about efforts that could be made to

increase Jordanian companies' to Canada."

Canadian exports to the Kingdom include telecommunications equipment, technology, aircraft, radar apparatus, automobiles, and wood. Main imports from Jordan have consisted largely of cotton apparel and textiles.

The Department of Statistics rates the value of Canadian exports to the Kingdom to be \$18 million. The discrepancy in figures is explained by the fact that goods of Canadian origin are not always shipped directly to Jordan from Canada, but reexported from other countries notably the U.S., Europe and the Gulf. Jordanian authorities classify the goods as being of Canadian origin regardless of the supply source.

Discussions with the Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Mohammad Saleh Hourani focused on Jordan's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"This would enhance Jordan's trading relationship with many countries including Canada as Jordan would be able to rely on the WTO," the minister said.

"We also spoke about the possibility of increasing the number of Canadian firms coming here to invest and enhancing the trade between the two countries," Hourani said.

The Canadian minister also met with Minister of Water, Energy and Mineral Resources Hani Mulki.

There are six major projects in the process of being jointly implemented by Jordan and Canada in the spheres of human resources development and the environment.

This minister's visit is part of a regional visit during which he is expected to visit Israel and the West Bank.

Witnesses in JVA murder case testify

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Witnesses in the case of two men standing trial at the Criminal Court on charges of murdering a senior Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) official in Deir Alla in November told the court on Saturday that they saw the main suspect rushing out of the victim's office with a gun in his hand.

Mohammad Abed, 41, a technician at the JVA, is standing trial on charges of the premeditated murder of Mohammad Habashneh, 48,

the assistant to the secretary general of the JVA in his Deir Alla office on Nov. 7, 1998.

Hussein Mahmoud, Abed's nephew, is standing trial on charges of complicity to the murder.

"I saw Abed rushing out of my boss's (the victim) office and he was holding a gun in his hand, and when I went to check the matter, I saw Mohammad (Habashneh) lying on the floor in a pool of blood," said Mohammad Saleh.

Saleh, one of five prosecution witnesses, told the court

that he did not recall hearing Abed issue any threatening statements against his boss.

Last week, three of the prosecution witnesses, including Habashneh's private secretary told the court that they saw Abed entering Habashneh's office, then reported hearing loud noises, and finally saw the defendant leaving the victim's office with a gun in his hand.

According to court documents, Abed was dismissed from his job upon Habashneh's recommendation, because "the defendant was

not disciplined in his job and used to start problems with his fellow employees."

"Because of his poor performance and his repeated violations, the victim transferred him to different departments and finally he recommended that he be dismissed from his job," the charge sheet said.

Abed decided to take revenge, and plotted to kill Habashneh, it added.

On the morning of the incident, the charge sheet said, Abed asked his nephew to drive him to the Jordan Valley.

"The defendant entered Habashneh's office, and without saying a word, shot him four times, and left with him for him in the car," the charge sheet said.

During the opening trial in early January, both defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The tribunal, which was comprised of justices Mohammad Ajarmeh, Mufleh Mubaidin and Issa Hamdan postponed the session until Jan. 26 to hear more prosecution witnesses.

Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee to meet in Baghdad this week

Decline in trade volume expected to dominate agenda

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee

will hold a meeting in Baghdad in the coming week to discuss economic relations and bilateral trade, according to Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Mohammad Saleh Hourani Saturday.

Hourani told the Jordan News Agency (Petra) that he expects the volume of trade between the two countries to be less than that of 1998 largely due to the decline in the price of crude oil over the

past few months.

The decline in the price of oil will naturally have a great effect on the volume of goods exported to Iraq, especially as Jordan adheres to the U.N.-Iraq oil-for-food deal, the minister pointed out.

Earlier this month Jordan and Iraq signed an oil agreement under which Baghdad will supply Jordan with 4.8 million tonnes of crude oil and by-products in 1999.

The Iraqi Ministry of Oil Under Secretary Ahmad

Basheer was quoted as saying that, under the agreement, Iraq will supply Jordan with oil at concessionary rates in return for Jordanian food and medicine. In previous years, when oil prices were higher, Iraq got in return around \$300-\$350 million worth of food and medicine from Jordanian firms.

Food and medical imports — if approval is granted by the U.N. Sanctions Committee on Iraq — are not covered by the sweeping U.N. sanc-

tions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Hourani told Petra that Jordan is keen to maintain its trade and economic links with Iraq, noting that next week's joint committee meeting will be preceded by a meeting of a joint technical committee.

Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Hani Mulki was scheduled to go to Baghdad to renew an annual trade deal between the two countries but had to delay his

trip due to a shortage of gas in Jordan.

Mulki was also earlier forced to postpone his visit to Iraq due to the American air strikes late last month. But Hourani did not say who will lead the Jordanian side to the Baghdad meetings. He only said that the joint committee meeting in Baghdad next week will involve Cabinet members whose ministries are concerned with the trade exchange deal.

YEA readies for official inauguration next month, seeks to bolster small-medium sized enterprises

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The nascent Young Entrepreneurs Association (YEA) will be officially inaugurated next month to encourage young businesspersons to set up new projects and improve investment opportunities in Jordan.

Leith Al Qasem who was elected first president of the association in December, said during an informal meeting with the press that the association planned to issue an "Entrepreneur's Handbook" — a business guidebook providing a rough framework or business plan for possible projects.

The YEA, founded in December with support from the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation, will start operating formally on Feb. 3, added Qasem, general manager of the Jordan Technology Group.

He said the planned handbook would enable the young entrepreneur to critically evaluate his project and correctly present it to financiers.

It will also include information on available finances provided by commercial banks, non-governmental organisations and foreign aid donors.

The idea of the association followed a study last year carried out by the German foundation and University of Jordan which revealed that most successful businesses in Jordan were small to medium-scale ones that did not

require huge paid-up capital. "One of our major goals is to change a traditional perception in our culture that one can only be safe when being employed in government institutions or in companies," said Qasem.

"Also, since our traditional and conventional economy has been stagnating in terms of what we can expect from it, we are forced to look into new solutions."

Jordan, a country of 4.2 million people, has limited natural resources and its economy is saddled by more than \$6 billion in foreign debts. More than 30 per cent of the population live below the poverty line while unemployment is officially estimated at 15 per cent and unofficially at as much as 27

per cent.

Qasem said it "was important to encourage young entrepreneurs to come up with new ideas involving new technologies such as programming and graphic design to build up their future."

He referred to the economic experiences of Japan and Singapore — two Asian countries with limited natural resources that have relied on their educated population and on improved services to jump-start their economies.

Qasem said he was optimistic that once the association becomes known in producing successful businesses, banks will help by offering finance for some projects.

YEA is working on inviting economic officials and experts from the United States, Europe and Asia to discuss their experiences and various successful business models.

It also plans to cooperate with other business associations that seek to improve the quality of both the economy and life in Jordan.

Qasem said Jordanian business pioneers and diplomats from Arab and foreign embassies will be among scores of guests to be invited to a reception marking the inauguration of the association on Feb. 3.

"There are a lot of countries that want to help Jordan but have not yet found the appropriate way to help or are sceptical about the past," he added.

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New English-language daily makes trial run

AMMAN (J.T.) — A new

English-language daily newspaper made a test run last weekend with its zero edition, published on Thursday and dedicated to His Majesty King Hussein's return to the country.

The tabloid-sized Arab Daily seems to have made a splash with 32 pages of full colour and exclusive interviews and photos, and industry sources have great expectations of the new publication.

"The layout, the writing and the production is new and very interesting," said Inad Hmoud, former economics editor of the Arabic daily Al Rai.

"It's going to have an impact not only on the English-language papers, but on the Arabic papers as well. It's not at all conservative. They are already opening files that are not handled by the others."

The zero issue, although dedicated to the King's return, was not shy in raising the issue of succession to the Throne and speculating on the King's possible considerations for a change to the succession.

The paper also featured a number of exclusive interviews, including one with Jordan's Ambassador to Washington Marwan Muasher, filed by the Arab Daily's own Washington correspondent Munir Nasser, and a second interview with the usually media-shy Chairman of the Jordan Telecommunications Compa-

ny Ali Shukri.

Arab Daily management, from the paper's inception nearly a year ago, promised that the paper would dare to explore issues other papers would not. Perhaps it should come as no surprise, since at the helm sits general director and chief executive editor Ramzi Khoury, former chief editor of the audacious and sassy Arab Daily and former front-page editor of the Jordan Times.

Stories filed from countries as far flung as Australia hint at the scope of the Arab Daily's ambitions.

"I am impressed by their efforts," commented Al Dastour chief editor Nabil Sherif.

"There was tremendous variety (including body and mind and technology pages) and a high degree of professionalism was exhibited. I do think that (the existing English papers) are good, but I do think that readers need another English-language paper to provide a different forum and kind of copy."

Sherif also said that he hopes the new paper, as an entirely independent paper, will "make use of the scope of its freedom" in turn encouraging the existing papers to "cover new grounds and be more courageous."

The Arab Daily will also be the first daily English-language paper to challenge the

Jordan Times 29-year-old reign over the sector. One other English-language paper, The Star, publishes weekly.

The Jordan Times chief editor Abdullah Hasanat lent accolades to the new endeavour.

"The first edition was well done, and much effort has apparently been invested in putting together the first issue," said Hasanat. "I hope the Arab Daily will do what we expect it to do — to be professional and boost the quality of news and pose a challenge so we can improve ourselves and our standards."

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Foreign currency trading remains at usual levels

By Suleiman Khalidi Reuters

AMMAN — Bankers in Jordan said Saturday that normal trading in foreign currency prevailed in the local exchange market despite a state of anticipation gripping the nation as it awaits the announcement of a successor to the Hashemite Throne.

Bankers said they did not witness an unusual demand on the U.S. dollar on the first day of business following a week-long holiday marking 'Eid Al Fitr and His Majesty King Hussein's return to Jordan after six months of absence abroad undergoing treatment for cancer.

Mufleh Aqel, a prominent Jordanian banker at the Arab Bank told Reuters that "the Jordanian dinar is

stable businessman and there is nothing to worry about and the sufficient quantities of the U.S. dollars are available and exchanged at the announced rates but there is slight margin of difference between the market price and the announced price."

Another banker works at the foreign exchange department at a commercial bank said: "There is a surplus of foreign currencies."

Another banker said: "There is no demand but rather to the contrary there is some satisfaction following the King's return and talk about the comprehensive changes."

The exchange rate of the dinar in the local market has remained around its fixed price to the dollar

and there was normal demand on the dollar and the market has enough surplus of foreign currency.

Bank trading in the U.S. dollars remained closed at the official rate of 708 fils to the dollar without any major transfers.

The Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) which is backed by satisfactory level of reserves in foreign currency had last July met an increase in demand on the U.S. dollar to contain speculation on the Jordanian dinar following announcement of King Hussein's illness without undertaking any measures restricting the freedom of foreign exchange transfers.

Aqel said: "The reasons behind the increase in demand on the U.S. dollars last July was the King's

illness but that illness has gone and the King has recovered and is now in good shape. Therefore matters should return to normal and those who sought refuge to the dollar should now return to the dinar."

Another bankers said: "The anticipated political changes are readjustment of domestic affairs and the dinar is stable and there is no cause for concern."

Jordanian bankers describe the CBJ's steps last July as reflecting wise management that led to reassuring the Jordanian people and resulted in curbing the speculation on the dinar.

In step seen as boost of confidence in the dinar denominated assets, the monetary authorities have raised the returns on pub-

lic debt tools and the certificates of deposits. Accordingly, the interest margin difference between the dinar and the dollar was in the vicinity of four per cent.

Bankers expressed great confidence that the monetary authorities will pursue measures taken in the past few years to liberalise the foreign exchange market.

Aqel said: "The reserves at the CBJ are at the satisfactory level and there is no way of reversing the liberalisation measures."

On the other hand, Jordanian stocks rose in value in active trading at the bourse and as they were not affected by the wait and see mood that prevailed in Jordan concerning political develop-

News in Brief

Cables to King Hussein continue to pour in

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday continued to receive cables of good wishes on his recovery and safe return home. Cables were sent by King Juan Carlos of Spain and his wife Queen Sofia, Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bushir, Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat, Kuwaiti Crown Prince Sa'ad Al Abdullah Al Sabah, Bahraini Crown Prince Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid, The Prince Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid, The Prince King also received cables from President of the Supreme Shiite Islamic Council in Lebanon Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Shamsuddin, Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) founder Ahmad Yassin, President of the Lebanese Press Association Mohammad Baalbaki and President of the Lebanese Editors Association Milhem Karam.

1999 budget endorsed

AMMAN (Petra) — A Royal Decree has endorsed the 1999 draft budget law, which was approved by Parliament earlier this month. The estimated government revenues for the year ended on December 31, 1999 stand at JD1.925 billion while the expenditure stands at JD2.160 billion thus leaving a deficit of JD235 million. Another Royal Decree has been issued approving the annex to the 1998 state budget. According to the annex, the amount of JD133 million will be added to the government expenditure.

What's Going On

Film

* "Fantomas" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, on Monday Jan. 25 at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Exhibitions

* Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.
* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

U.S., N. Korea resume talks on suspected N-site

GENEVA (AFP) — The United States and North Korea resumed talks here Saturday over Washington's demand to inspect an underground site it suspects is being used to revive Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

The talks are aimed at saving a 1994 agreement under which Communist North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme in return for aid and the easing of Korean-war era sanctions.

Negotiators from Pyongyang and Washington met last week-end without progress.

Before going into Saturday's talks, a North Korean official said big differences remained between the two sides.

The alert was raised in August when a U.S. spy satellite spotted activity at an underground site at Kumchangri, north-east of the capital Pyongyang. The site is close to North Korea's mothballed nuclear reactors.

U.S. officials fear it could be used to produce plutonium for nuclear arms.

Pyongyang says the site is for undisclosed civilian purposes and has demanded Washington pay \$300 million to take a look.

North Korea has suffered years of famine and a shrinking economy and needs foreign aid to feed its people.

It routinely uses the threat of

its nuclear and missile capabilities to try to extract aid from the United States and its allies.

However, a U.S. diplomat here said: "We are not buying access to this facility, whatever the currency."

The U.S. Congress has threatened to block further funding for the 1994 accord unless North Korea provides answers to concern over its nuclear and missile capabilities.

Under the accord, a U.S.-led consortium agreed to replace North Korea's risky graphite nuclear reactors — which produce weapons-grade plutonium — with safer light-water models.

The United States also agreed to supply 500,000 tonnes of fuel oil annually to help with North Korea's energy needs until the reactors come on stream, around 2003.

Collapse of the agreement would confront Washington and its allies in the region with tough choices about how to deal with a heavily-armed North Korea that may already have built nuclear devices.

The talks come amid mounting tension.

Pyongyang recently launched a rocket over Japanese territory, supposedly to put a satellite into orbit.

Tokyo insists it was a ballistic missile test.

North Korea has also issued a

series of military threats against its rivals, including Japan, after a recent visit to the region by U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen.

The United States has 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea, where the 1950-53 Korean war ended in an uneasy truce without a permanent peace treaty ever being signed.

Four days of talks between the rival Koreans — and involving the United States and China as their respective wartime allies — aimed at brokering a permanent peace deal ended here Friday.

The four nations agreed to meet again in April but there was little progress on the main sticking points — North Korean demands that U.S. troops be withdrawn from the South and that a peace treaty be signed between Pyongyang and Washington before substantial progress can be made on other issues.

Meanwhile at Saturday's talks, North Korea is expected to raise the issue of a senior diplomat who went missing from its Berlin mission recently and is reported to be seeking asylum in the United States.

Pyongyang claims the diplomat was kidnapped by U.S.-backed South Korean agents and has threatened reprisals unless he is handed over.

African states suspend Burundi sanctions

ARUSHA, Tanzania (R) — Burundi's military government won an end to its international isolation Saturday when its African neighbours agreed to suspend economic sanctions to encourage peace talks aimed at ending a five-year civil war.

The sanctions were imposed after Major Pierre Buyoya took power in a military coup in July 1996. The seven nations who led the embargo agreed to suspend it for as long as the peace talks continue to show progress.

"The regional leaders have unanimously agreed that sanctions should be suspended, not removed completely, but suspended," Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said at a summit meeting in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha.

The summit was also attended by the leaders of Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Ethiopia and senior government officials from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia.

Buyoya, now Burundi's president, addressed the summit and pledged to push forward with efforts to bring a quick end to the civil war between his

ethnic Tutsi-led government and Hutu rebel groups.

"The government of Burundi shall leave no stone unturned to ensure that we arrive at a peace agreement that is all-inclusive by the end of the year," Buyoya said.

At least 150,000 people, most of them civilians, have died since the war began in 1993 when the army murdered the country's first democratically elected president, a Hutu. Both sides have been accused of indiscriminate attacks on civilian communities.

The heads of state at Saturday's summit said they would closely monitor the peace talks over the coming months and would review the suspension of sanctions based on progress made at the negotiating table.

Peace talks with the groups began last June and Burundi's main pro-Hutu political party Frodebu entered into a partnership with Buyoya's government the following month.

The talks in Arusha are still at an early stage and all sides agree they face an uphill struggle to overcome deep mistrust between the majority Hutu

population and the main Hutu rebel groups had argued against lifting sanctions, saying it would discourage Buyoya from making concessions.

But Buyoya said Saturday that the move would help the peace process. "This wise decision will allow us indeed to make more headway along the path to peace," he told the regional leaders.

The sanctions initially included a total trade embargo and a ban on flights in and out of Burundi. They had been steadily relaxed, and widely flouted, but effectively made oil and other imports more expensive and the country's poor were widely seen as bearing the brunt.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based rights group, had asked the regional leaders to impose an arms embargo against both sides in the civil war. It warned that lifting sanctions without a weapons ban "sends a dangerous signal" to Burundi's armed forces which would now be able to import arms legally.

Quiet preparations herald royal wedding in Monaco

MONACO (AFP) — The only clues that Princess Caroline of Monaco and Prince Ernst August of Hanover planned to marry Saturday were a series of last-minute preparations after recent sightings of the two together.

The civil ceremony took place in a private late-morning ceremony in the royal palace's minor room, according to well-informed sources in the principality.

The head of judiciary services, Patrice Davost, was to preside over the ceremony as is customary, the sources added.

No information pinpointing the exact time of the wedding was leaked, but guests' cars began arriving around 11:10 a.m. (1010 GMT), suggesting a morning ceremony.

An hour earlier, the presence of some 50 photographers under strict police surveillance hinted at preparations for a grand event in the principality.

Another clue came when Monegasque florists started delivering flower arrangements while caterers unloaded china and crystal at both the Palace and Caroline's seaside "Clos St. Pierre" residence.

An afternoon cocktail was announced at the famed Hotel de Paris.

The palace, which has remained tight-lipped about the wedding, promised to release an announce-

ment around 5:30 p.m. Saturday.

Scrutiny of these clues triggered intensified talk that Caroline, second in line for the Monaco throne, would wed the head of one of Germany's oldest aristocracies, a cousin of the Windsors and Spanish Bourbons.

The wedding, coinciding with the princess' 42nd birthday, comes as no real surprise to royals-watchers.

Ernst August and Caroline have been romantically linked since before the 44-year-old German aristocrat separated in October 1997 from his wife of 16 years, Chantal Hochuli, the daughter of a Swiss millionaire. A marriage — Caroline's third and the prince's second — had been rumoured for some time.

The two have been spotted together all over the world — in Germany, Kenya, Corsica and St. Tropez. But it was Ernst August's presence at the royal table during the Red Cross ball in Monte Carlo last August that signalled the royal family's tacit acceptance of the relationship.

Ernst August and Caroline both attended the 23rd international circus festival in Monte Carlo on Jan. 16, along with her father, her sister Stephanie and her brother Albert, heir to the throne.

The couple's appearance there was viewed as semi-official. Both have children from previous

marriages.

Caroline had three children with Stefano Casiraghi, the son of an Italian industrialist — Andrea, 14, Charlotte, 12 and Pierre, 11 — before Casiraghi was killed in a racing boat accident in October 1990 off Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, near Monaco.

After his death, Caroline led a quiet life in the country, fiercely protecting her children from the press. She herself was however unable to escape media attention, and the press has feverishly followed her love life, including her courtship with August.

The prince, who holds both German and British citizenship, is a descendant of one of Germany's oldest aristocracies and is related to the British royal family.

He has two children from his marriage to Hochuli, Ernst August, 15, and Christian, 13.

Friday evening, French RTL radio said Prince Rainier "informed French President Jacques Chirac early this week of the upcoming marriage of his oldest daughter Caroline with Ernst August of Hanover."

"The civil ceremony will be held tomorrow (Saturday) afternoon in the principality," the radio added.

The existence of a letter by Rainier to the French president confirming the marriage was confirmed to AFP by reliable sources.



Picture dated July 16, 1998, of General Secretary of South Africa's United Democratic Movement (UDM) party Sifiso Nkabinde addressing supporters in his Magoda township stronghold outside Richmond, some 60 km northwest of Durban. Nkabinde was shot dead early Jan. 23 when a number of people opened fire on him outside a shopping centre in the politically tense town of Richmond (AFP photo)

S. African political figure Nkabinde shot dead

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — The controversial general secretary of South Africa's United Democratic Movement (UDM) party, Sifiso Nkabinde, was assassinated early Saturday in KwaZulu-Natal province, police said.

Nkabinde was shot dead when a number of people opened fire on him outside a shopping centre in the politically tense town of Richmond, regional police chief Superintendent Henry Budhrum said.

Two bystanders were wounded, Budhrum said. They were not his mother and bodyguard as police initially believed, he said.

"This morning, shortly after 8:00 a.m. (0600 GMT), we received a report that Mr Nkabinde and two

other people had been wounded and were taken to hospital," Budhrum said. "A few minutes later we received another report confirming that Mr Nkabinde has passed away."

UDM leader Bantu Holomisa condemned the shooting as "barbaric".

"It's a pity that these people have targeted the leader of our party in the area. We appeal to the people of Richmond to assist the police in tracking down the perpetrators," he told the South African Press Association.

Tensions between political parties in the Richmond area soared since Nkabinde's release from jail at the end of April last year. He had been facing 16 charges of murder and two

of incitement to murder.

Nkabinde, an expelled member of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), was acquitted on lack of evidence.

He was considered a warlord and behind much of the violence in the province, where politically motivated killings are rife.

He was booted out of the ANC in 1997 amid allegations that he spied for apartheid security structures, and later joined the fledgling UDM.

Violence in the area, also gripped by unrest before the first democratic election in 1994, has been linked to mounting hostility between the ANC and Holomisa's new party ahead of a general election due in mid-year.

Albanian says KLA freed five Serb hostages

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo Saturday released five Serb civilians taken hostage two days earlier, an ethnic Albanian source told AFP.

The information could not be immediately confirmed by an independent source.

Murat Musliu of the Albanian human rights cen-

tre in Srbica, central Kosovo, said the three Serb men and two women, kidnapped from Nevojane village near Vucitrn, were freed Saturday "somewhere in the Drenica region."

Drenica is a central region of Kosovo that is controlled by the KLA, which is fighting Yugoslav security forces for the independence of the Serb

province.

The five Serbs have been turned over to members of the OSCE Kosovo ceasefire verification mission, Musliu added.

William Walker, head of the OSCE mission, earlier Saturday condemned the kidnapping, saying it was unreasonable and unprovoked to kidnap civilians.

S. Leone rebels still active

FREETOWN (R) — Rebels fighting to topple Sierra Leone's president remained active Saturday on the outskirts of the capital Freetown, with a West African intervention force conducting mopping up operations there.

President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, speaking on Radio Democracy late Friday, said that pockets of rebels remained in Freetown and sources close to the ECOMOG force reported action against rebels on the eastern and western fringes of the city.

"The mopping up operations by ECOMOG will carry on beyond the weekend," Kabbah said, apologising for the continued presence of rebels in the city more than two weeks after they entered and tried to take it by storm.

The Rome-based Catholic missionary news agency MISNA said Saturday that the rebels had shot dead one of six nuns they were holding captive.

"Yesterday one of the sisters of the Order of Mother Teresa, kidnapped last week by Sierra Leone rebels, was killed," MISNA said in a statement.

The rebels had also tried to kill a kidnapped Xaverian missionary, but he had escaped with gunshot wounds, the agency added.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council reaffirmed its support for Kabbah's elected government and the ECOMOG operation but said the situation remained serious and expressed "grave concern" at the growing number of refugees and their plight.

ECOMOG sources said Saturday that its soldiers had met pockets of resistance in the east between Calabar and Kissy, an area overlooked by hills, and spoke of rebel infiltrators in forest on the western fringes of the city beyond Lumley.

Lumley residents reported the sound of shelling from beyond the suburb and took to the streets overnight with machetes and sticks after reports of rebel sightings in the area, witnesses said.

ECOMOG sources confirmed that the force had shelled woodland areas in the west.

ECOMOG has retaken control of the city from rebels and renegade soldiers loyal to a military junta that ousted Kabbah in May 1997.

The forces opposing Kabbah, who was reinstated by ECOMOG in March 1998, seized eastern districts of Freetown and parts of the centre in early

January after resisting ECOMOG's efforts to defeat them upcountry for most of 1997.

The rebels stepped up their activity after their leader Foday Sankoh was sentenced to death for treason in October.

Sankoh's supporters entered the city on Jan. 6. He remains in loyalist hands.

ECOMOG officers said Friday that Nigerian fighter-bombers were attacking rebel hideouts in hills east of Freetown.

Nigerian and Guinean units were closing in on rebels trapped in the eastern outskirts, they said.

In a sign of growing loyalist confidence in Freetown, a curfew was relaxed by three hours Friday. It will now run from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. (1800 GMT to 0700 GMT).

The U.N. Security Council, meeting Friday, urged all sides in the conflict to ensure the safety of all humanitarian personnel, to allow them to work effectively and to respect their impartiality and neutrality.

Church and other relief groups began distributing food aid Friday. The supplies — rice, cooking oil and other supplies from the main port area — had escaped looting during the rebel attack on the city.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yeltsin and Albright to hold phone talks in Moscow

MOSCOW (AFP) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will talk on the phone with President Boris Yeltsin when she visits Moscow next week but is not scheduled to meet him in person, the Russian foreign ministry said Saturday. Russian officials had put on hold a meeting with Albright during her trip to Moscow Monday and Tuesday after Yeltsin was hospitalised Sunday with an acute stomach ulcer. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin was evasive Friday when questioned about whether a meeting was scheduled. Relations between Moscow and Washington have become strained since the United States in December launched air strikes against Iraq, which is Russia's closest Middle East trading partner. The United States had hoped to soothe Russia's irritation over the attacks during Albright's Moscow visit.

Cambodia's King Sihanouk arrives home from Beijing

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Cambodia's ailing King Norodom Sihanouk arrived in the capital Saturday following more than two months of medical treatment in Beijing. Wearing a dark suit, the smiling 76-year-old King Sihanouk was welcomed at the airport by scores of Cambodian government officials and diplomats as he moved slowly down a red carpet from his aeroplane. Hundreds of residents cheered his motorcade as he drove to the palace. "I am fine and feel better," King Sihanouk shouted to reporters before getting into his black Mercedes-Benz limousine. Prime Minister Hun Sen is expected to call on the king Sunday in order to submit his application for resignation from the post as Cambodian army commander in chief. He remains prime minister. King Sihanouk is reported to be suffering from a variety of ailments including cancer of the colon, but last month Prime Minister Hun Sen assured reporters the monarch was in "good health."

Italians rescue 23 boat people off Brindisi

BRINDISI, Italy (AFP) — Coastguards rescued 23 would-be immigrants, some of them from the troubled Serbian province of Kosovo, from a small boat that was in danger of sinking off the southeast coast of Italy, police said Saturday. Two Albanians in charge of the 12-metre boat were arrested, police said, adding that their passengers included Iraqis and Kosovars. The boat, which had been taking on water and in danger of sinking as it neared the Italian coast Friday night, was taken in tow.

Arrested newspaper boss transferred from police custody

HARARE (AFP) — A third newsman arrested Friday in connection with an article about an alleged coup bid has been moved from a police holding cell but his whereabouts are unclear, a colleague said. Clive Wilson, the managing director of the independent Sunday Standard, was picked up by detectives from the criminal investigations department Friday afternoon to face charges under the country's law and order maintenance act. "They have transferred him from Harare, central (police station), but we don't know where he has been taken to. He was moved last night," the colleague told AFP. Civic and rights organisations have expressed fears that the police might hand him over to the army and the state security agency as they did to the first two journalists arrested over the same story. The two, Mark Chavunduka, editor of the Sunday Standard and reporter Ray Choto, alleged severe torture including electric shocks and suffocation after a court released them from detention Thursday. Home Affairs Minister Dumiso Dabengwa Friday vowed to stiffen security laws to ensure political stability following the publication of the coup attempt story. "I would like to warn the press that granting them the freedom of expression does not give them the right to publish lies with the intention of creating public disorder. We won't allow that to happen," Dabengwa said. The Jan. 10 article said 23 army officers had been arrested in connection with a foiled coup to topple President Robert Mugabe from power.

Sixteen hurt in 15-vehicle pileup on Paris-Lyon road

LYON, France (AFP) — Sixteen people were injured, three of them seriously, when 11 cars and four lorries piled into one another on the expressway between Paris and Lyon, rescue services said Saturday. The crash occurred just before 10 p.m. (2100 GMT) Friday at Savigny-les-Beaune about 140 kilometres north of Lyon on the A63 expressway. Rescue services closed the northbound centre of the road for two hours, the regional information centre said. The national highway information service blamed the pileup on the speed of traffic. Contrary to earlier reports, road conditions were dry and visibility satisfactory, the service said.

China launches giant ozone testing balloon

BEDJING (R) — China Saturday launched what it said was the world's biggest scientific balloon, a 40-storey vessel equipped to survey the ozone layer, the official Xinhua news agency reported. The balloon was sent aloft at noon (0400 GMT) at Huizhou city in southern Guangdong province and landed safely after a two-hour flight collecting data, the agency said. The balloon contained 30,000 cubic metres of helium and could reach a height of 30,000 metres, the report said. It did not say how high the balloon flew Saturday. China would launch another ozone testing balloon during the Spring Festival, China's main annual holiday which falls in mid-February, Xinhua said.

Sporadic heavy weapons fire heard from southwest of Brazzaville

BRAZZAVILLE (AFP) — Sporadic heavy weapons fire could be heard early Saturday from southwest of Brazzaville, where Congolese army forces are fighting militiamen backing former prime minister Bernard Kolelas. Some weapons fire was also heard overnight from the same area, thought to be Limzolo, about 20 km southwest of the capital. State television late Friday showed footage of several militiamen reportedly killed in the southern Brazzaville district of Baongo. The report said they had hidden out in the district since fighting last month. Army forces shelled Baongo and nearby Makeleke for three days in mid-December in an offensive which left several hundred dead. A blockade on the two areas was lifted Tuesday. The Congolese army, backed by troops from Angola, has been fighting the so-called Ninja militia in the Pool region southwest of Brazzaville since Dec. 10. In another development Saturday, President Denis Sassou Nguesso named General Jacques-Yvon Ndolo army chief of staff, replacing General Yves Mongo Motomdo, who was "called to other duties" according to the presidential decree.

delivered to 150



Indonesian firefighters hose down burning buildings after riots broke out in Ambon. Three days of Muslim-Christian rioting left at least 45 people dead and the toll was expected to rise as patrolling troops pulled more bodies from the smoldering rubble (AFP photo)

Indonesian military threatens to shoot rioters

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia's military threatened to shoot rioters and dozens of houses burned Saturday as clashes between Christians and Muslims continued for a fifth day in eastern Indonesia.

Police say 47 people have been killed since the violence flared Tuesday. The death toll was expected to rise as searches looked for more victims in the ashes of dozens of burned out buildings.

"I dare not go out of the house because I can hear gunshots," said one resident, who identified herself only as Ina.

Police said 20,600 residents who had fled the unrest had taken shelter in army bases and police stations.

Two military planes evacuated 149 people, mostly foreigners, from the worst-hit island of Ambon where the airport remained closed

to commercial flights.

Half flew to neighbouring Australia and the rest nearby Sulawesi island.

Most had sheltered at an air force base outside Ambon city, the island's capital, since the violence broke out.

"We saw smoke billowing from the local oil and gas depot.

Local women and children were being transported up a river to safety," said Anna Fewell, an American from Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

"We were stranded for three days at the airport. All the roads were blocked by gangs," said Arnold Gosselink, 32, of the Netherlands.

Some residents armed themselves with knives and swords to protect their homes on Ambon, 2,300 kilometres northeast of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.

Privately-owned SCTV network said dozens of homes were burning

Saturday as armed gangs roamed the streets. The city's streets were littered with smoldering car wrecks, and its main market had been reduced to ashes.

Eastern Indonesia's military commander Maj. Gen. Amir Sembiring warned rioters to stop fighting.

"We urge them to keep their arms at home. Should they continue to disobey, we will order our troops to fire," SCTV quoted Sembiring as saying.

Troops and riot police have repeatedly fired warning shots to break up rival mobs.

Col. Karyono S., the provincial police chief, said 37 had been killed by rioting in Ambon city, six in the nearby village of Batubulang and two on Sanana island.

Hundreds had been injured. Most of the 45 dead were Muslim.

"The toll is expected to rise as

we believe that a number of bodies are still trapped in the ruins of buildings," the official Antara news agency quoted Karyono as saying.

Many victims were stabbed, beaten or trapped in fires. Some were attacked with rocks, machetes, clubs and even bows and arrows.

Seven mosques, nine churches and 189 houses were burned in the violence, he said.

A curfew was imposed to prevent further fighting between rival gangs on Ambon, Sanana and Seran islands, known in Dutch colonial times as the Spice Islands.

The islands in eastern Maluku province are the latest site of rioting that has plagued crisis-ridden Indonesia in the past year. Soaring inflation, unemployment and poverty rates have fanned social tensions ahead of general elections scheduled for June 7.

French National Front rebels gather to form breakaway party

MARIGNANE, France

(AFP) — Dissidents of France's far-right National Front were set to form their own breakaway party at a two-day conference opening Saturday in this southern French town, spelling an end to the party as it now exists.

The birth of the new rebel party, bearing the same name, will mark the final chapter in a damaging seven-week row between Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader and founder of the 26-year National Front, and his would-be heir, Bruno Megret.

Megret, the former party ideologue and organiser, was booted out of the National Front along with his top aides in December after issuing an open challenge to Le Pen by calling the conference to elect a new leadership.

Recognising the move for what it was — "a putsch and a plot" — Le Pen refused to attend, saying: "I will not abandon the ship's helm to a

handful of perfidious lieutenants and quartermasters."

But Megret and his partisans, most of them apparatchiks wielding influence across the party machine, went ahead with their bid to organise the conference, collecting more than 17,000 petitions in their favour from the Front's 42,000 card-carrying members.

Saturday, some 2,500 Front delegates were expected to attend. The two-day conference schedule includes a total overhaul of the party rules as well as the election of a new central committee, political bureau, and a president — expected to be Megret.

"Should Jean-Marie Le Pen not attend his own party's conference, he will be responsible for removing himself from the movement as regards his current position," Megret said.

His warning came as a slanging match between the two men turned increasingly

ugly and personal in the run-up to the weekend meeting.

The 70-year-old Le Pen, notorious for his often outrageous racist and anti-Semitic comments, accused Megret of acting like a "psychopath" and hinted he belonged in a mental asylum.

He said Megret's challenge reflected a hunger for power and warned that as head of a breakaway new party, his ex-number two could emulate his role-model, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Le Pen even mocked Megret's modest physical stature.

"Even if it's difficult my friend, try to put your feet on the floor," he said. "There's no dishonour in being small, but there's no point in acting bigger than you are."

Megret for his part has been softer and more civilised in his attacks on Le Pen, sticking mainly to politics — but always managing to hit a raw

nerve — in trying to push the "old guard" leader toward the way out.

"Le Pen is a diva who has botched his exit," he said this week, remarking that while Le Pen had played a historic role in founding the party he had ceased to be its driving force.

In another statement likely to prompt an angry response from Le Pen, Megret said he planned to sell the party's headquarters outside Paris if he comes out winner in the legal battle for the right to the party name.

But whatever the animosity between the two men, the real test of who is likely to come out on top will come after the conference.

According to a poll published Friday in the daily Le Parisien, 67 per cent of National Front members remain loyal to Le Pen and 73 per cent believe he is the best representative of their far-right ideas.

Romania assesses cost, reasons of miners' march

BUCHAREST (R) — Romania

Saturday assessed the costs of a setback for Romania's bid to show the West it was serious about reforms anchored in solid post-Communist institutions.

"Surrender!" screamed the headline in the daily Zina. "The government has given the miners exactly what they were demanding before the clashes."

The miners, up to 10,000 strong, returned to central Romania's Jiu Valley coalfield overnight after their leader Miron Cozma won concessions on pit closures and pay during four hours of talks at a monastery with Prime Minister Radu Vasile.

The prime minister said he acted to stop the country from being plunged into chaos. President Emil Constantinescu had been poised to introduce emergency rule unless the miners resumed home.

In the aftermath of the deal, the two men, along with other top cabinet ministers, were consulting the country's biggest trade unions on social policy at Cotroceni presidential palace.

Some commentators saw the outcome of the miners' escapade as a setback for Romania's bid to show the West it was serious about reforms anchored in solid post-Communist institutions.

"Surrender!" screamed the headline in the daily Zina. "The government has given the miners exactly what they were demanding before the clashes."

Others wanted to know why riot police were overwhelmed twice by miners who advanced nearly 200 km down country roads. More than 120 people, mostly policemen, were injured in the biggest clash Thursday in a ravine.

"Where were the intelligence services while Cozma was organising an army, instructed and led in pure military fashion?" Adevarul asked in its editorial. "Will the leaders of interior ministry troops be put on trial for obvious betrayal?"

Several newspapers suggested that wide sections of the security forces were sympathetic to the

extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party, which has close links to Cozma and has lionised the miners action as an "anti-mafia and corruption revolt".

The Jiu Valley's main town of Petrosani, 350 km west of Bucharest, was chilly and quiet after the return of the miners, with none of the area's 13 mines in operation.

Remnants of rudimentary road-blocks of sand, concrete and vehicles, set up by police only to be overwhelmed within minutes by the marchers, remained strewn across the region's main road.

A Reuters correspondent saw police deployed earlier in the week leaving the area aboard trucks, with plastic anti-riot shields put in the place of smashed windcreens.

Under the deal negotiated by the prime minister, two mines slated for closure are now to remain open.

Miners' pay, already more than twice the national monthly average of \$100 in one of eastern

Europe's poorest countries, will be linked to a plan to cut costs and operating losses.

Villagers, indignant at almost a decade of declining living standards, had joined miners in attacking police lines.

"We achieved most of our main demands," Cozma said on returning to Petrosani at the head of a cavalcade of cars, buses and dump trucks. Both sides gave ground, he said, but Romania had won.

Cozma was jailed briefly last year for leading riots in Bucharest in the early 1990s which terrorised the capital's residents and led to the resignation of the government.

Cutting back a bloated coal industry, a relic of a Communist-era drive into smokestack industries, is a key plank in reforms vital to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

The march proved a huge embarrassment to the government, with an IMF mission due to visit Bucharest later this month.

Judge orders Lewinsky to testify

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A

U.S. federal court judge has ordered Monica Lewinsky to talk to prosecutors in President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial, CNN reported Saturday.

U.S. District Judge Norma Holloway Johnson ruled that Lewinsky's continued cooperation with the House managers was part of the immunity agreement she hammered out in mid-1998 with independent counsel Kenneth Starr, CNN

said.

On July 28 Starr granted Lewinsky immunity from prosecution in exchange for her grand jury testimony in the Clinton sex scandal.

Judge Holloway Johnson ordered the 25-year-old former White House intern to talk to the lead prosecutor in the Senate impeachment trial, Republican Henry Hyde, and his team of House managers. Hyde wants to informally

interview Lewinsky as the Senate decides on whether to call witnesses in the Clinton impeachment trial.

News of the ruling came as the 100 senators resumed Clinton's impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate Saturday. The president's defenders and prosecutors continued to clash over the issue of calling witnesses before the senate.

The senators were to spend a second day inside their ornate

chamber feeding questions to House prosecutors and White House defence lawyers through presiding U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

News of the attempt to get Lewinsky to talk was "a desperate attempt by some to win a case that is increasingly problematic to House managers," Democratic Senate minority leader Thomas Daschel told the Washington Post late Friday.

Professional Opportunities Information Systems Division / Administration Section Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company Ltd.



Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company is seeking highly qualified, experienced and motivated professionals to fill the following vacancies in the administration section of the Information Systems Division.

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To assist ISD Director in day-to-day operations, provide administration and HR services to division staff, plan/execute a training agenda for division staff, communicate with end users regarding support issues. Best candidates would have the following qualifications:

- A bachelor degree in Computer Science, Engineering, or Business Administration.
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- Excellent command of both Arabic and English, and MS Office 97. Knowledge of MS Project 98 is a plus.

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To design technical and functional document/form standards related to integrated financial systems including technical manuals, user-guides, policies/procedures manuals, system documentation, do periodic review & evaluation of standards, audit status of existing documentation, and ensure adherence to set standards by ISD staff.

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- Knowledge of MS Office 97 is a definite plus.
- Excellent command of both Arabic and English.

To apply, candidates should fill relevant forms available from the Personnel Department, Jabal Amman, First Circle, Mutanabee Street, P.O. Box 1079, Amman 1118. Please attach a complete up-to-date resume of work experience, qualifications. Last date to apply January 31, 1999. All applications will be handled confidentially.

Chairman of the Board

Professional Opportunities Information Systems Division / Applications and Technical Sections Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company Ltd.



A major project is under implementation at the Information Systems Division, ISD, of Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, JPR. The project involves integrated business applications running on two IBM AS/400e servers. The company is seeking highly qualified, experienced and motivated professionals to fill the following vacancies in the Applications and Technical Sections of ISD.

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- BS/MS degree in Computer Science or related fields.
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- Experience in software development and implementation, system analysis, 3 & 4 GL languages, client/server applications, and project management.
- Self-motivated and have good communication and interpersonal skills.

Assistant Director / Technical

To work closely with ISD Director, Assistant Director / Applications, manage and lead the technical group in the implementation, support, and operation of the IT infrastructure in JPR. Qualifications include:

- BS/MS degree in Computer/Electrical engineering.
- Good knowledge of midrange and client/server platforms.
- Experience in installation and maintenance of system software, RDBMS, application software, networking, and project management.
- Self-motivated and have good communication and interpersonal skills.

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Experience in financial, distribution or maintenance application systems is highly desirable. Candidates should be able to work with integrated systems. Qualifications include a university degree in Computer Science and excellent spoken and written English.

To apply, candidates should fill relevant forms available from the Personnel Department, Jabal Amman, First Circle, Mutanabee Street, P.O. Box 1079 Amman 1118. Please attach a complete up-to-date resume of work experience, qualifications. Last date to apply January 31, 1999. All applications will be handled confidentially.

Handwritten signature in Arabic script.

Chairman of the Board

Jordan Times

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Good news from decline

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Faneek

of 2.2 per cent more realistic and credible. The growth of exports is counted on the positive side as a credit to the balance of payments, and an addition to GDP, while the growth of imports is counted on the negative side as a

debit in the balance of payments and is treated as a subtraction from GDP. The foreign trade sector as a whole, and despite its contraction in 1998, will contribute positively to the growth of the economy.

Hopefully what was realised in October and November 1998 will continue and become a trend of new and sustained direction. We want exports to grow and imports to decline together with the trade deficit and the degree of exposure of the Jordanian economy. Such a development is desirable and can lead to a higher degree of self-sufficiency.

The decline of imports should not necessarily reflect negatively on the standard of living in the country, nor consumption, because the volume of the growth of local production may have compensated for the gap.

Cutthroat politics in Israel

IT WAS not uncharacteristic of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to react to his defence minister's intention to challenge his leadership by firing him. Yitzhak Mordechai had the right words to describe his former boss. "Netanyahu is not worthy of my confidence and respect... (and) the confidence of the Israeli people."

Thanks to Netanyahu's policies, the Israeli body politic has now ended up in turmoil. Mordechai's decision to desert Netanyahu and the Likud Party and join the principal centrist party is obviously a major setback for Netanyahu in his bid to win another mandate in the coming general elections in May. The Israeli prime minister was crossing his finger right up until the deadline for voter registration, hoping that Mordechai would register as a member of the right-wing parliamentary ticket. The defence minister, who is very popular in Israel, failed to come through for Netanyahu and thus, now, where Mordechai casts his lot will be a significant determinant on the fate of the Israeli political landscape during the next Knesset elections and the election of a prime minister.

The recent personal message of U.S. President Bill Clinton to Mordechai, in which he pinned hopes on him to rekindle the stalled peace process after a hiatus of nearly three years, is an important signal of where Washington stands in the face of the projected Israeli elections. With retired Israeli army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Likud defector Roni Milo, and now Mordechai in the picture, the three are expected to offer a serious threat to Netanyahu's hold on the premiership as well as the Likud Party.

This augurs well for the peace process. A change to the centre or to the left of the political spectrum in Israel is clearly better than the status quo which is certain to lead the peace process further into a quagmire.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Dustour's Orais Rintawi said that the Arab League's foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo is an opportunity to "rehearse" for the proposed Arab summit and a device to measure the degree of difference and likeness between the Arab states, especially concerning Iraq. Although the ministers will have the ultimate chance to express their countries' positions since the conference's results were drawn in advance in Ghardaqa and Cairo and it is difficult to imagine the deliberations will render any surprising conclusions, added Rintawi. In their preparatory meetings, the ministers founded the "golden base" for upcoming stands and strategies, which stipulate that the regime and people of Iraq should be regarded separately, said the writer. The new formula's first half, which is freeing the Iraqi people, has become a common concern of all parties in the region, he added. The second half, which is the sanctions, is still debatable regionally and internationally. In order to strengthen the idea of separation between the regime and the people, the U.S. announced its intention to hasten the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, said Rintawi.

Al Dustour's Jihad Momani said it is not unusual that the U.S. is exerting pressure on all Arab countries in order to resume the strikes against Iraq. Momani quoted Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Sahhaf as saying that the U.S. administration has delivered more than 20 "written directives" to Arab governments suggesting a cover for the possible strikes. The cover would be an international licence that will be used with countries that might object the idea of dividing or destroying Iraq, the writer said. This time the U.S. needs such a licence because its plans face objections from several Western countries, which cannot be ignored, he added. The directives show how the U.S. domination is absolute and how the Arab regimes are helpless, said the writer.

THE FOREIGN trade sector in Jordan is currently diminishing to the dismay of importers, exporters and retailers. Statistics show that national exports declined in the first eleven months of 1998 by 3 per cent, re-exports dropped by 8.5 per cent, and imports decreased by 6.5 per cent, all in comparison to the same period of 1997.

This unexpected and unusual contraction of the foreign trade sector can be taken as a sign of economic recession and possible negative growth of the economy last year, yet we venture to describe it as a healthy contraction, because it represents a structural improvement in the foreign trade sector and a step forward in the direction of bringing the Jordanian economy closer into balance.

The foreign trade sector was,

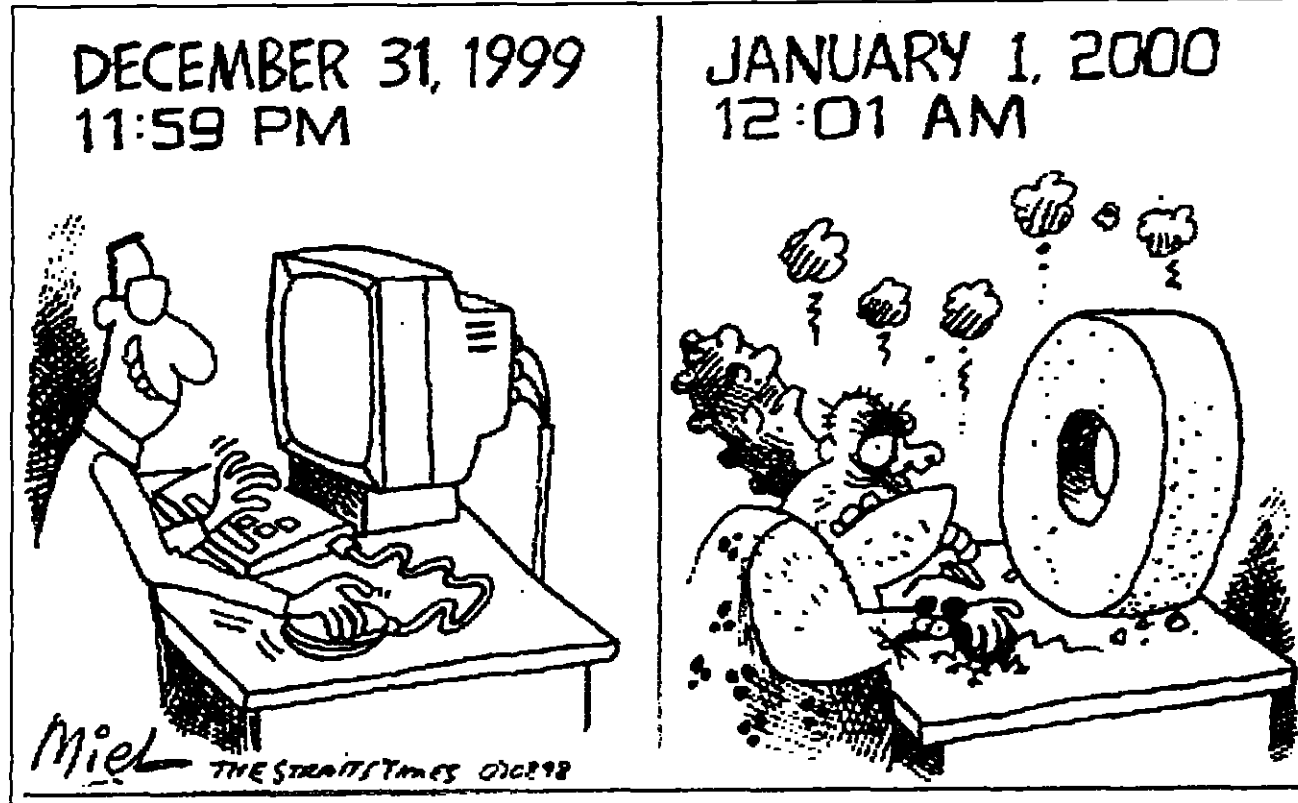
and still is, one of the weak points in the balance of payments in particular, and in the Jordanian economy as a whole in general. The value of exports hardly exceeded 40 per cent of the value of imports, which is obviously an unhealthy and unsustainable situation, because the gap is being filled by non-constant, exceptional sources such as foreign grants, loans, and remittances.

The shrinkage of Jordan's foreign trade sector during 1998 was caused by a small percentage decline in exports which, admittedly, is a negative phenomenon, but also by a larger percentage decline in imports, which is a positive phenomenon. These changes resulted in a net decrease in trade deficit and the achievement of another step towards self-sufficiency: a sort of balance between exports and

imports.

Fortunately, the figures for the last quarter of 1998 gave an exceptional good reading, which should not be blurred by the figures of 1998 as a whole. During October and November 1998 national exports grew by 9.9 per cent and 12.4 per cent respectively, while imports at the same time decreased by 1 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively. Thus the net trade deficit was lower than in the same months of 1997 by 10.1 per cent and 45.6 per cent respectively.

Therefore, the nature of contraction, taking place in the foreign trade sector, may not reduce the rate of growth of gross domestic product (GDP) as one may think, but will improve the rate of economic growth to make the prediction of the minister of finance for growth rate in 1998



A new direction for Germany

By Gwynne Dyer

"THE RED-GREENS" policy on foreigners jeopardises security in Germany more than the terrorism of the Red Army Faction," said Edmund Stoiber, premier of Bavaria, in a recent interview. "We do not want a multicultural society." But he's going to get it — and a great deal else that he doesn't like besides.

Stoiber, the leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU), is widely seen as the man likeliest to lead the right-wing coalition in Germany's next election, but that is almost four years away. For now, at least, the 'Red-Greens' — the Social Democrats (SPD) and their junior partners, the Greens — are in power, and after 16 years in opposition they are moving fast to make up for lost time.

In the first weeks after the election, as they scrambled to form a cabinet, the new partners looked distinctly uneasy for power. But three months later, the policies coming out of Bonn on a wide variety of issues — citizenship, NATO, Europe, nuclear power — are breathtakingly bold by comparison with the past.

Germany's neighbours and allies have grown used to a country that is far less assertive than its size and wealth (80 million people and the world's third-largest economy) would normally suggest. The older generation of German politicians felt a residual sense of guilt about Germany's past, and were always aware of the acute sensitivities of their smaller neighbours.

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's cabinet are a new generation, and they are challenging the old policies in ways that were unthinkable during the cold war. For example, the new government is committed "to campaign to lower the alien status of nuclear weapons and for a renunciation of the first use of nuclear weapons."

The 'right' to use nuclear weapons first has always been a stated NATO doctrine, and for the Pentagon it is the strategic Holy of Holies. No NATO member has ever challenged it openly before. But this German government (with strong Canadian support) is determined to take it all the way to the NATO 50th

anniversary summit in April which is supposed to define the alliance's new "strategic concept."

Bonn is being equally forthright on the European unity issue. It is following in the footsteps of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who promoted European Monetary Union mainly as a way of making closer political integration unavoidable — but where Kohl tiptoed and dissimulated, Schröder's government just says what it thinks.

This month's launch of the euro, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (leader of the Greens) told the European Parliament on January 12 was "not primarily an economic, but rather a sovereign and political act. Europe has already changed far more than most of our citizens have realised: a significant section of national sovereignty has been transferred." Kohl could not have put it better — but he would never have put it that bluntly in public.

The Schröder government's motives are the same as Kohl's: to embed Germany so deeply in 'Europe' that the hostilities and fears that drove the continent to war so many times in the past can never re-emerge. But Germany holds the presidency of the European Union (EU) for the next six months, and its goals are very ambitious.

"Political union, including new member states... is the logical follow-on from economic and monetary union," said Fischer, urging the EU to move on from the old unanimity principle and accept majority decision-making in all areas except amending the basic treaties. As a first step towards a federal constitution for Europe, he added, Germany would propose a "European Charter of Basic Rights to consolidate the legitimacy and identity of the EU."

Strong stuff — and the domestic initiatives have been just as radical. Ending all reprocessing of plutonium (including cancelling existing large contracts with Britain and France), for example, as a prelude to phasing out all nuclear power generation in Germany. And, most controversially of all, opening up German citizenship to people who are not 'ethnic' Germans.

Germany has around eight million resi-

dents who were born elsewhere, or are the children of 'guest-workers' who came to Germany in the 60s and 70s to do the low-wage jobs that the Germans themselves did not want. They form about the same proportion of Germany's population as do recent immigrants and their families in Britain or the U.S. — and, of course, most of them speak German, hold down jobs, pay taxes, and regard Germany as their home.

But whereas the comparable people in Britain or the U.S., except for very recent arrivals, are almost all citizens, none of the German residents are. Germany still adheres to the 'Blood Law' of 1913 that restricted citizenship to people of German ancestry.

Resident 'foreigners' in Germany might be granted citizenship after 15 years, but rarely if they were of Turkish origin (as half the 'foreigners' in Germany are). And the lucky few recipients were required to burn their former passports in front of the judge.

That is all going to change. The new government will give 'foreigners' born in Germany, and those resident there for over eight years, the right to a passport (and thus to vote). Third-generation 'foreigners' born in Germany will automatically become citizens, and can hold dual nationality. It's estimated that some 4.2 million people could become German citizens fairly quickly — which would certainly shift the electoral odds in favour of the left.

Maybe that's why the former ruling parties, the Christian Democrats and the CSU, have gone berserk. They have launched a nationwide petition to stop the changes that uses rhetoric verging on the racist. "It's a very dangerous development," says Guido Westerwelle, leader of the Free Democrats (who were also in the previous government). "They are raising ghosts that we may not be able to lay to rest."

But the 'Reds' and the 'Greens' are trying to drag Germany into the 21st century before it's over, and they may well succeed. It will be a much better country for it, but it will take some getting used to.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

A synonym for bigotry

By Ray Hanania

MERRIAM WEBSTER and America Online have issued an apology because of lexicon related definitions they provided that have been denounced as offensive to homosexuals.

Sure enough, I connected to America Online — the largest Internet information service in the United States — and tried to access Merriam Webster's thesaurus and it was "temporarily off-line." Wow, I thought. That was fast action in response to a public debate over what is and what is not acceptable. The Internet really does work! Then I remembered research I had done several months earlier for a publication detailing the history of Arabs in America. I realised that Merriam Webster's scrap with the homosexual community is not their first such encounter.

No, in fact, Arab Americans have been complaining to Merriam Webster for years,

but to no avail. Here is what Merriam Webster offers in the thesaurus in response to the word "Arab": "Function: n. Text: 1. Synonyms VAGABOND, clochard, drifter, floater, hobo, roadster, street Arab, tramp, vag, vagrant. 2. Synonyms PEDDLER, idler, hawk, higgler, huckster, monger, mongerer, outcrier, packman, vendor." Of course, to add insult to injury, here is how Merriam Webster's dictionary describes the phrase "Sweet Arab": "Sweet Arab: Pronunciation: -Ar-ab, -A-rab. Function: noun. Usage: often capitalised. A. Date: 1859; a homeless vagabond and especially an outcast boy or girl in the streets of a city." Now, if Arabs were homosexuals in the United States, we could protest and Merriam Webster would quickly remove the offending terms from the thesaurus and dictionary.

Or, if we were "disabled gay African-American women orphaned Siamese twins who lived on the moon," Merriam Webster would remove any relative offending terms for that group, too.

But since we are "Arabs," and Merriam Webster apparently doesn't give a damn about Arabs, they won't change the hateful terms they use to describe us.

I have never heard anyone call me a "Clochard," "Duffer" or "Higgler," although I have been called "Sand Nigger," "Wog," "Dervish," "Towel Head," and "Fuzzy Wuzzy" — all terms made popular in many Western and American movies.

Frankly, though, I'm not sure which are worse. But I do know that the hypocrisy of Merriam Webster is outlandish, disgusting, outrageous and totally unacceptable.

And if Merriam Webster weren't a "broad," I'd punch her in the nose, too!

The writer is a Palestinian/American author and journalist.

LETTERS

Best wishes

To the Editor:

WE WOULD like to take this opportunity to express our feelings of happiness for the recovery and return of His Majesty King Hussein to his homeland, Jordan.

Although we are far away, our thoughts are with His Majesty King Hussein. We are happy to be a part of the celebration of his full recovery and his successful return home.

Our prayer is that he will remain strong and healthy for his family as well as for the entire Jordanian family there and abroad.

He has been such an inspiration to both the young and old for his wisdom, integrity, and strength. His endurance, courage, and stamina throughout his illness, are commendable to say the least. We salute you, Your Majesty.

God bless and keep His Majesty and Her Majesty Queen Noor, and the entire Royal family.

Adel, Nancy, Sarah, Lori, and Jacob Amara, California, U.S.

A death-threat to children?

To the Editor:

TWO WEEKS ago, dashing into an unfamiliar supermarket for a copy of the Jordan Times, I noticed amidst the bubble gum and lollipops at the checkout... fireworks!

Being born in a nation which has an annual fireworks celebration and one where the sale of fireworks is strictly controlled; yet one in which there is an annual telling of ghastly fireworks horror stories, I recoiled at this sight.

What if somebody should enter this area smoking? What would then happen to this unprotected display box?

I didn't have many days to come to terms with my initial sense of foreboding.

Earlier in the year, having heard that fireworks were to be encouraged to deter shootings at celebrations, I felt we were substituting fire with fire!

Tell me over the last fortnight who has not witnessed similar events to these I will now relate?

1. Schoolboys lighting and throwing these devices on a nightly basis.

2. Minors coming from shops clutching these dangerous devices passing revellers smoking on the post office streets.

What finally made me set pen to paper was last week, after watching His Majesty King Hussein's moving 'Eid address to the nation on TV in which he spoke of a controlled reception for his homecoming.

My family and I thought we would soak up the Ramadan atmosphere in the souk.

We had just arrived on the busy roads when our journey was punctuated by a huge and terrifying sound... youths who thought it was funny to throw fireworks beneath a loaded bus. Those of you reading only need a little foresight to see what might have been.

Have we taken leave of our senses? Is this how we entertain our youth, giving them toys of explosive potential upon which to spend their precious few pence?

Quite simply fireworks must not be freely available without the adoption of a national fireworks code. For ones common sense should demand restriction on these novelties.

1. Fireworks are not toys: they are filled with gunpowder or equivalent chemical compounds. Their use should be educational.

2. Fireworks should be sold only to responsible adults, preferably only for organised and licensed displays/celebrations.

3. Fireworks should only be sold in outlets which meet a civil defence safety standard. They should be kept in sealed display units away from food and flammable materials. Outlets should have a no smoking policy.

4. Fireworks which are on sale in Jordan have minimum instructions in poor English, and mostly on the cartons not the individual products. All of these products should carry explicit safety instructions in Arabic.

5. Where fireworks are sold, safety tapers to light them should also be on sale which should be used to light fireworks at arms length.

6. JTV and the press should carry public safety commentaries on the correct use of fireworks.

7. Fireworks should never be relied. "Duds" often stay alight inside, many cases of blindness have resulted from people returning to these silent failures.

8. Only sparklers should be held — in a gloved hand!

An alarmist, no, not I, the annual Guy Fawkes celebration was one of my favourite, as a child in England. Needless to say, my father kept a lid on the sealed fireworks box while I enjoyed the colourful illusion. What was most tragic, was to watch November 5th news bulletins and watch the catalogue of blinding, burns and worse, to those who did not follow the instructions.

Are we ready for fireworks? Are we merely putting on a cheap death threat for the nation's children? Wouldn't it be so much better to prepare the children for the future by putting a reasonably priced children's magazine or comic on sale at these same checkouts.

There is enough pain in life without putting it on sale in guise of pleasure to our children. Let those in authority take action against these devices before we read the tragic headlines.

Edwin

The

By S

AT THE Arts Exhibitions... of various drawings... predominate... after the sun... sculpture... more prominent... done by... white... tall-wind... One of the most... black... contemplation, in so... surely not in... making is that C... who made this... sculpture before... student, Gh... design at the... He likes th... and the amount... given to each st... I've been read... sculpture, but I... place like this r... I will take dra... improve my scu... Next to the tre... image, the sen... Michelangelo's... done in light... down Elias Jreis... tectural engineer... as his entry in... Through he onc... centre, this is h... ture, He had I... Michelangelo's... of it before... "By drawing it... truly special it... course here I c...

One for the ghetto

Last week, having served an 18-month ban for biting a lump out of Evander Holyfield's ear, Mike Tyson won his comeback fight with a single blow warmly applauded by those who feel he is fighting for them.

By Jim White

WHAT, ASKED a reporter, had Mike Tyson said to Francois Botha, just before he applied a punch of such force to the South African's chin that it sent the 18-stone man staggering on a comical excuse-me across the ring and ended last Saturday's fight. "Just things boxers say," lisped Tyson in that disconcertingly gentle speaking voice of his. Come on, pushed the reporter (a braver man than most): when the two boxers had grappled at close quarters, whispering evil nothings into each other's ears, what were the exact words he had used?

"Okay, since you ask," said Tyson, his upper lip rolling into the sneer that once terrified half of America. "what I said was: 'I'm gonna fucking kill you, white boy.'" As the three-ringed circus of Team Tyson pulled into town a week before the fight, it seemed to many that Las Vegas was the perfect place for Iron Mike to take up his ugly trade once more. This city — built on the fortune made from convincing Americans that it offers them the chance of a better life even as it empties their pockets — could provide a platform like no other for what one senior American commentator referred to as "the mini-series that is Mike Tyson". Everything here is fake. The long strip of hotels and casinos that form the modern Vegas is stuffed with the ersatz: outside the Luxor hotel, for example, is a Sphinx made of pre-stressed concrete, life-sized and perfect in every detail, only with those bits that the Egyptian original has lost to the weather thoughtfully restored; there's a half-sized Eiffel Tower under construction a little way down the strip; an art gallery full of copies of the world's great paintings; and though St Mark's Square may be sinking under the Venice lagoon, don't worry — someone is building an exact replica in Vegas. Every casino boasts entertainment featuring localities: there's a Will Smith doing comedy at one, the Spice Girls at another, and dozens upon dozens of Elvises — though, of course, one of them might just be the real thing.

It is all about as genuine as an apology from Bill Clinton — and therefore, according to many commentators, ideal for Mike Tyson, 1999 model. Because those who know about these things will tell you that the real Tyson disappeared years ago, lost in a cycle of depression, domestic violence and paranoia. He is now but a pastiche of that bull-like 20-year-old who terrified the heavyweight division in the mid-1980s.

For various reasons, not least three years in prison for rape and the long ban for biting Evander Holyfield, Tyson had been to work only 11 times in the Nineties when he faced Botha last weekend. He had won eight of those fights and lost three; by no coincidence at all, he lost each time he faced a significant contender. Tyson is, say his detractors, on the slide. All that is left is an illusion, propped up by hype.

Even the hype is in decline, now that he has parted company with Don King, the electric-haired big-mouth who used to manage him, their relationship collapsing in a vortex of \$100 million legal claims and counter-claims. "At least with King not around," said one boxing writer, "there's a bit more oxygen for the rest of us." But what makes Tyson's decline all the more precipitate, runs the theory, is that he himself knows it's happening. He is now engaged in the desperate, ultimately fruitless task that faces every sportsman whose powers are in decline: he is trying to turn back the clock. And the futility of the exercise is having major consequences on his mental stability.

Not that you could tell by looking at him. Just like the fake Caneleto and Van Gogh in the strip's art gallery, he looked to the uninitiated eye like the real thing. All last week, an enormous video screen outside the MGM Grand — the vast casino and hotel complex that was hosting the fight — announced Tyson's comeback: "Six miles of roadwork, 500 sit-ups, 500 stomach crunches, 30 minutes jumping

rope, one hour in the weights room," read the captions over shots of Tyson sweating, toiling, looking terrific. "Then breakfast." Which makes him a rarity among visitors to Vegas: the only thing most of them appear to manage before breakfast is three other breakfasts.

At the weigh-in two days before the fight, Tyson looked even better than on the video. When he stood on the scales and stared malevolently at the sea of cameras at his feet, he was a frightening sight — well, as frightening as any man can be when dressed only in his underpants. Muscles were piled on muscles, and his neck was so thick it looked as if it could easily have absorbed a sledgehammer blow to the head. All the vital physical statistics — the 17-inch biceps, the 20-inch neck, the 12-inch fist — remained as they had been in his all-conquering youth.

But boxing, like all sports, is conducted largely in the mind. Or rather, in the mindlessness. The more a boxer has to think, the more he must persuade his limbs to go about their vicious business, the less chance he has. The best boxers move by instinct. Tyson has not been moving by instinct for a decade. Instead of having a clear head, it has become fogged with business and domestic problems, not to mention a seemingly endless battle with the media, which, he is convinced, want only to see him fall. Largely, he is right. He has turned from being the sharply-focused fighter of his youth into a man whose mind is so full of angst that it is splitting apart at the seams.

As the fight drew nearer, Tyson was constantly at it, behaving appallingly at press conferences and living up to low expectations. Some dismissed this as mere hype, an attempt to gain headlines in the hope of selling tickets. True, tickets needed selling — on the day of the fight, they were still freely available, and 3,000 had still not been bought as the bell sounded for the first round — but Jim Gray, the boxing reporter for Showtime, a U.S. sports channel, believes that, for once in Vegas, there was nothing fake about Mad Mike's outbursts.

He characterised the boxer by comparing him with the recently retired basketball player, Michael Jordan. "One guy named Mike is a true ambassador, who is utterly comfortable within himself. And the other guy named Mike isn't. The only thing you can really say is that these two people are at totally opposite ends of the spectrum. Unfortunately for Mike Tyson, he has wasted the opportunity to be a Mike Jordan. For that, we should all feel bad."

It is an analysis typical of the anti-Tyson camp — Mike is just an unmitigated bad boy, they say — but it fails to acknowledge that the qualities required to succeed in a sport that involves popping a ball through a hoop are significantly different from those needed for one predicated on rearranging your opponent's facial features. But perhaps that is the point: the real reason why America's huge, sprawling boxing media have been so condemnatory of Tyson is that he is the last thing they need. Those who make their living by commenting on a pursuit that grows ever harder to justify could do without someone growingl around scaring the horses. Which may be why, some years ago, an attempt was made to re-cast Tyson as the thinker and wit the game had been crying out for since Muhammad Ali retired. Peter Hammill, who in the Seventies was one of many would-be Boswells to Ali's Johnson, was the first to make claims for Tyson's intellect after speaking to the former champion in prison. Hammill reported that Tyson had converted to Islam, was a student of philosophy and an avid reader of Nietzsche and Machiavelli. Why, he even had a tattoo of Che Guevara on one of his pectorals, which must mean something.

Those who saw him in action last week, though, would have seen considerably less evidence of intellectual capacity than of alarming mood swings. One moment, as he moved through the media tent at the back of the MGM Grand, his entourage in his wake, Tyson was an engaging interviewee, laughing that he didn't know how his current wife — Monica Turner, a doctor of paediatrics whom he married in 1997 (her previous husband is serving ten years on drugs offences) — put up with him.

The next, he was raging. On several occasions, he lost all control. Machiavelli would not have been impressed by his response, live on air, to one television interviewer, who had merely asked the kind of question Tyson must have been asked a thousand times before: was he the same fighter as before? "Fuck you," Tyson screamed in sudden fury. "Fuck you up the ass."

"I think we'd better terminate the broadcast here," said the interviewer. "Yeah, fuck you asshole," yelled Tyson, before being dragged away by The Croc. The one thing that everyone can agree on, however, is that Tyson has been so constantly exploited throughout his life — by managers, girlfriends, financial advisers, the lot — that he has some justification for thinking that the world really is out to rip him off. Whatever the cause, those who witnessed his outbursts could see that this guy has mental problems. Real mental problems.

But then, there are those who love a bit of mad misbehaviour from their champion, who see Jordan's ambassadorial behaviour as compromise, who admire the way Tyson so steadfastly refuses to play the game of Media Nice Guy. And they began to arrive in Vegas the night before the fight. By its nature, boxing tends to attract followers who appreciate physical hardness above all things, and for whom the ability to knock someone out cold is the most accurate way measure of a real man. Go to the York Hall, in Bethnal Green, London, to see a boxing bout and you would be hard-pressed to find a meaner-looking bunch of individuals — and that's just the crowd. But Tyson's supporters, in particular, have a reputation in the game: they are the Millwall of the sport. No one likes them and they don't care.

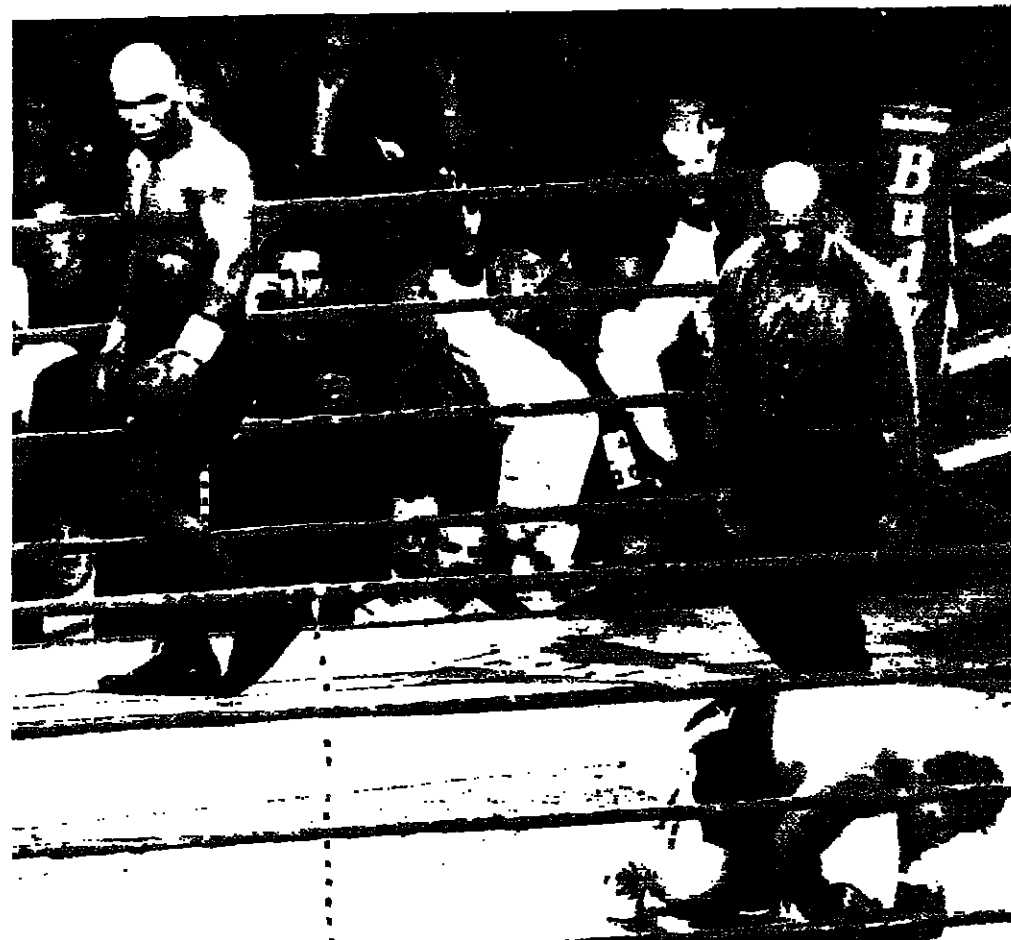
Vegas is only an hour's flight from Los Angeles, so it is the ideal place for the tribal gathering of gangstas and homeboys that always enfolds a Tyson fight: the perfect venue for deals to be done, meets to be made and scores to be settled. It was after seeing Tyson beat Bruce Seldon in Vegas in September 1996 that the rapper, Tupac Shakur, was shot dead. And after Tyson's previous bout in the city, against Holyfield in June 1997, a full-scale riot erupted in the MGM Grand, causing the casino to shut down for two hours, at a cost, rumour has it, of \$9 million in lost gaming profits.

Outside the MGM's arena on the day before the Tyson-Botha bout, a security man filled me in on the arrangements for the fight. "Last time, Tyson fans ran through the casino stealing chips from the craps tables. This time, we're putting 265 armed cops in the arena. We ain't taking no chances." It turns out that, the moment that earlier fight ended with Tyson's disqualification for snacking on Holyfield's lobes, shots were heard in the arena. Spectators fled in panic, giving the perfect cover for a heist on the gaming tables. According to the security guard, however, the thieves never got the chance to cash in their chips. "The casino got them all back," he smiled. "Let me give you a word of advice, because I know you Brits like to misbehave at sporting events: there's one place you don't mess with the management, and that's in a casino."

This is the bargain that the MGM Grand makes when it pays to stage a Tyson fight. Like every casino in town, it is touting for business, trying to encourage the punters to use its slot machines, roulette wheels and craps tables, rather than anyone else's. For decades, the casinos have bought in big-name attractions to suck in passing wallets — and a Tyson fight attracts big spenders: the LA gangsta needs to prove to his peers that he is a serious player, and there's no better place to do that than in a casino.

The night before the fight, I was sitting at a roulette table, quietly losing \$25, when a punter in the leather-coat-and-beret-but outfit favoured in certain sub-sections of LA gangland slipped into the seat next to mine. He slapped five \$100 chips, specially minted for the occasion with Tyson's face on them, on the black square. The wheel spun and the ball landed on a red number. He had lost. "You should have gone red," I said.

"On the black, man," he said. "Like my man Tyson, always on the black."



'Boom!' went the crowd as Botha tottered. 'Boom!' went Botha's big backside as it hit the canvas. 'Boom!' everyone shouted each time the shot was replayed

Thus, up to a point, Tyson's followers and their deep pockets are welcome at the MGM. And that point was reached at about 11pm the same night. By then, there were gangstas all over the casino, smoking big cigars, drinking champagne, greeting each other with complicated handshakes. Despite a conspicuous lack of threatening behaviour, it was then — apparently acting on a pre-arranged plan — that the casino management started easing them out. It was a simple operation: target the black people. One man, who seemed to have stepped straight off the set of Superfly (why else would anyone be dressed in an ankle-length mink coat, matching mink homburg and mink-covered shoes?), seemed particularly aggrieved at being turned away before the Grand could take his money. He had a point: security had just let Donald Trump walk in, no questions asked.

At the casino's gold-plated main entrance, security guards, backed up by brown-shirted Las Vegas cops, stopped anyone black from coming in. The tension and mutual distrust was palpable. As they say in these parts, this was fear and loathing. And when you see it in action — this assumption that anyone who is black is a riot about to happen — you begin to understand why these guys identify with Tyson when he complains about white America, and to appreciate why they admire him for refusing to behave by its standards. You can see why they love someone whose power and physique sets off the alarm bells buried deep in the white gene pool.

This is not to say that Tyson is watched only by black gangstas. Plenty of Americans of every hue and profession turned out to see his return to work. The celebrities, too, were out in force, their names announced as they arrived, to let us all know that this was the place to be seen. Jack Nicholson, Pamela Anderson, Roseanne, they were all there, none of them worried that their reputations might be damaged by association with the beast. And there was Ali himself, getting the biggest applause of the night as he tottered his way to a ringside seat, a just-about-walking indictment of the long-term consequences of this thuggish trade. It was a night for dressing up, not just in the celebrity enclosure, but everywhere in the arena: a night for showing how much you had spent on your latest suit, your chunky, gold finger furniture and your woman's swell new chest.

It was an evening for Vegas-style show.

— The Guardian

The Arts Centre Student Exhibit: Freedom and the basics

By Sally Bland

AT THE Arts Centre's Winter 1998 Course Exhibition, the general impression is of variety and contrast. While drawings predominated at the exhibition held after the summer course, this time round sculpture and ceramics have a more prominent place among the 80-odd pieces done by 28 students during the centre's fall-winter session.

One of the more striking sculptures is a massive, black head, eyes closed in contemplation, in sadness, perhaps in agony, but surely not in dreamless sleep. Just as striking is that Ghassan Lu'ay Al Amir, who made this piece, has never studied sculpture before. Formerly an architecture student, Ghassan now studies graphic design at the Applied Sciences University. He likes the freedom of expression and the amount of personal attention given to each student at the Arts Centre. "I've been dreaming all my life of doing sculpture, but I didn't think I'd find a place like this in Jordan," he says. "Next I will take drawing; that will help me improve my sculpture."

Next to the troubled face is its opposite image: the serenely beautiful head of Michelangelo's David, an excellent replica done in light-coloured clay by Khalidoun Elias Jreisat. Khalidoun is an architectural engineer and counts architecture as his entry into three-dimensional art. "Though he once took drawing at another centre, this is his first training in sculpture. He had long been fascinated by Michelangelo's David and did 20 sketches of it before embarking on the statue. "By drawing it, I came to realise how truly special it is," he relates. "From the course here I discovered my own style

and abilities. I gained confidence." However, he does not feel that what he has learned about sculpture at the Arts Centre will influence his work. "As an engineer, the projects I work on are not flexible," he explains, "but sculpture is part of my character. I was waiting for the chance. Life is not only eating and drinking; art is important in order to develop taste and to experience life from other points of view."

Seven other heads are on display — heads, torsos and a number of expressive whole body figures done by female students. Some are classical in style; others are more modern, depicting poses from everyday life. While all the sculptures are human figures, the ceramics students produced inanimate objects — bowls, towers, lanterns, a pitcher, a telephone — with the eye-catching exception of an octopus draping its legs over a clay jar.

On the walls of the exhibition rooms hang black-and-white pencil drawings, a cluster of three still-lives for each student who completed the first or second drawing class. In each case, the first drawing depicts basic shapes — spheres, cylinders, cubes — with the second and third drawings graduating to more complex objects, like vases, fruit, a teapot. Though the subject is the same, there is



Sculpture by Luhaz Abu Kushk

enough variation in style, shading and tone to make it interesting to view and compare the drawings. The comparison cuts two ways. On the one hand, there is variation in style from student to student; on the other, one can chart the progress of each individual from the first drawing made in the course to the final one.

Another way of assessing the students' development is to view the pieces entered in the competition which parallels the exhibition.

The ability to bring out different tones was named by several students as an important skill they had learned at the centre. "From one colour, many tones can emerge," says Samia Kawai, who took the first drawing course last summer and has just completed the second. "This is even true of pencil sketches; hundreds of tones can emerge in black and white." Samia has liked drawing since childhood. For about three years she has been working in oils, doing both landscapes and abstracts. "I like abstracts best; after all, a scene can be photographed," she notes. "I can see my improvement from taking the drawing course here because, even for abstracts, you must master the techniques of classical drawing. I have seen many centres and previously took three courses at another one, but there they just gave you things to draw. Here there is more emphasis on the necessary methods, the basics; it is more systematic."

Judging from the exhibited works and conversations with students, drawing is definitely the most tightly structured among the courses offered at the Arts Centre. Beginners are encouraged to take the two basic courses which focus on still

life drawing before going on the third which introduces portraits. Mastery of drawing skills is required before studying watercolours and oil painting. This emphasis on acquiring a firm academic basis step-by-step was mentioned by almost all students as a major asset of the centre's curriculum.

The amount of personal attention given by the staff was also mentioned as a plus by many students. "The teacher followed our work at every step of the way, evaluating and imparting knowledge, rather than what I have experienced before — just being told my work is good or not," comments Lamis Aboudi, who studies graphic design at the university but enrolled at the Arts Centre for artistic enrichment. "Here I learned to look at things anew. This makes me want to learn more," says Lamis who has been drawing and doing portraits and landscapes in watercolours, acrylics and oil for some time on her own. "I benefited more from this course than from any other place where I have studied, because it is more systematic," she concludes.

"I like three-dimensional things and I felt I could use my imagination more," says Mai Abu Ayyash to explain why she chose ceramics. Mai is in training to work at a new hotel. She enrolled at the Arts Centre for fun, to try something new. "I avoided sculpture because it requires a lot of patience, but I learned patience in the ceramics course. At first I thought I wouldn't be able to sit through a whole three-hour class; then I became totally involved and didn't think about the time. They gave us three things to do: a cube, a cylinder built up by coils and a rounded shape. Then we could choose what we did for our final project. I chose an octo-

pus because I like the sea and animals." Mai's other outstanding piece is a cube-shaped lantern with a different design carved into each side.

A clay bowl, pitcher, tower and telephone, all bearing marks reminiscent of ancient Greek pottery, are the work of Shoushan Meserlian, who had rather unique reasons for studying ceramics: "I like nature, and clay is from nature. I compare ceramics with dentistry, even some of the tools are similar. The way we carve in clay is like how the dentist moulds our teeth. I say this because many people think art isn't important, just a hobby, but it is more. It's related to science, psychology, history, geography... Through art, you study all these things with pleasure."

Shoushan has been a teacher for 15 years and currently teaches art at the Abdul Hamid Sharaf School. "Before I started, I thought I knew everything from having modelled dough with children, but at the first class, I suddenly felt I knew nothing," she admits. "Then, gradually, as I continued, I felt I was rediscovering what I had known. Besides learning about technique, this course helped me evaluate my own teaching, what I've done right and wrong over the years. Children are not clay to be moulded in our hands. Each has artistic skills. It depends on the teacher, who can either repress students' ideas or bring them out. I appreciate my teacher at the Arts Centre for allowing us to be ourselves, just as I appreciate my principal at school, Dr. Sue Dabbah, who helped me be free in my thinking. That makes me be more creative."

The exhibition runs until February 16.

World Bank projects in Asia plagued by problems

WASHINGTON (R) — Financial turmoil in East Asia has sharply increased the number of World Bank projects in the region plagued by problems and has nearly doubled the percentage at risk of failure, a bank report has said.

More than 16 per cent of World Bank projects in East Asia faced "serious problems" in 1998, up from 10.5 per cent in 1997 and 4.7 per cent in 1993, according to the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department.

It said 27.5 per cent of the bank's projects in the region were at risk of not achieving their objectives in 1998, up from 14.6 per cent in 1997 and 10.5 per cent in 1993.

For Indonesia alone, more than half of the bank's ongoing portfolio of projects were at risk of failure.

"They have not failed; they are at risk, which means we have to concentrate on finding out how to salvage them, restructure them, cancel them, renew them," Robert Picciotto, director-general of the operations evaluation department, told a news conference in Washington.

"What we have, following the East Asia crisis, is a major job of reevaluating our ongoing portfolio," he

said. The World Bank did not spell out the problems facing specific projects in specific countries.

But as a rule, when the World Bank lends money to a government to fund a project, it spells out targets. It may set a timetable for construction of roads and schools or ask the government to change certain economic policies before more money is paid out.

The World Bank attributed the growing number of problem-projects in East Asia to the region's financial crisis, which has crippled government spending on social programmes and increased poverty.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other lenders have responded to the turmoil by rushing billions of dollars in aid to the hardest-hit states — Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand.

Despite last year's sharp increase in problems with projects, the World Bank said East Asia was in line with other developing regions, which have made progress over the last year. The bank said Africa and Latin America have been particularly successful.

The report stressed that more than three-quarters of World Bank-supported development projects had

"satisfactory outcomes" in 1998, but Picciotto said: "The bank still needs to improve its performance in getting sustainable results."

The World Bank said the number of problem-plagued projects in Asia could increase in the months ahead if growth does not pick up. "We have not yet probed the downside," Picciotto said. "The risks are higher."

Progress in Latin America might also be set back because of recent turmoil in financial markets.

The World Bank report, based on a review of 298 projects, also warned of a sharp increase in inequality between the rich and poor in developing nations. The bank estimates that Asia's financial crisis has pushed at least 20 million people back into poverty in the last year.

It recommended that the World Bank give greater emphasis to social sector development.

Asia's economic turmoil sparked a regional debate last Friday on whether crisis-hit countries should move fast to provide their people with unemployment insurance and other social welfare benefits.

Economists, academics, and government officials attending a World Bank-hosted seminar explored

the possibility for Indonesia and Thailand to follow South Korea in investing in state-run unemployment insurance programmes.

The three countries are the worst victims of the 18-month Asian crisis, the worst seen by the region in more than 50 years.

A paper prepared on the social impact of the crisis said South Korea, responding to its surging social problems, had implemented a comprehensive unemployment benefits package.

It said about 25 per cent of Koreans losing jobs after the crisis started in the second half of 1997 had benefited from the programme last year.

The paper said the number of unemployed soared in the three countries in 1998 when the jobless in Thailand rose about 132 per cent to 1.5 million, by 200 per cent to about the same number in South Korea, and by 350 per cent to 20 million in Indonesia.

It said Indonesia's textile industry, which employed mostly women, had laid off half a million workers by March 1998.

Sakool Zuesongtham, secretary of Thailand's Federation of Bank and Financial Institution Workers Unions, estimated that at least 30,000 bank and finance company employ-

ees had been made redundant since the government closed their companies from mid-1997.

Peter Heller, a senior official of the IMF, told the meeting he supported proposals for Asian countries to expand unemployment insurance schemes provided they could keep financing costs under control and the benefits do not serve as a disincentive for people to find new jobs.

Thai Finance Minister Tarrin Nimmanahaeminda joined the debate by telling participants in a luncheon talk that Thailand had no immediate intention of investing in such a costly plan.

"We don't believe in Thailand that there should be a social insurance programme in such a way that puts a burden on the society in the long run. For the society to prosper, people must work...and have the ability to take care of themselves," he said.

With assistance from various multilateral agencies, Thailand has launched a three-year, \$462 million Social Investment Project that mainly aimed to create community jobs in rural areas and cushion its people from the impact of the Asian crisis.

Exchange Rates

Saturday, 23-01-99 ACCESS 4848868

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	BAHRAIN DINAR	QATAR RIAL	OMAN RIAL	SAUDI RIAL	YEMEN RIAL	IRAN RIAL	INDONESIA RUP	THAILAND BATH	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAM DONG	LAOS KIP	MYANMAR KYAT	NEPAL RUPEE	AFGHAN AFGANI	PAKISTAN RUPEE	INDONESIA RUP	THAILAND BATH	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAM DONG	LAOS KIP	MYANMAR KYAT	NEPAL RUPEE	AFGHAN AFGANI	PAKISTAN RUPEE
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1927	1.8778	1.8369	0.1844	0.2077	0.0789	0.1000	0.0100	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
BAHRAIN DINAR	5.2687	1.0000	1.0213	9.9489	9.7436	0.1000	0.1108	0.0372	0.1250	0.0125	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012
QATAR RIAL	5.1881	0.9781	1.0000	9.7422	9.5403	0.1000	0.1093	0.0372	0.1247	0.0125	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012
OMAN RIAL	0.5325	0.1028	0.1048	1.0000	0.9853	0.1000	0.1057	0.0372	0.1241	0.0125	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012
SAUDI RIAL	5.1429	0.9708	0.9913	9.7573	9.4972	0.1000	0.1057	0.0372	0.1241	0.0125	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012
YEMEN RIAL	0.2688	0.0508	0.0523	0.8015	0.7849	0.0830	0.0830	0.0300	0.0830	0.0300	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030	0.0030
IRAN RIAL	48.145	0.9088	0.9280	9.0407	8.8533	0.0961	0.1057	0.0372	0.1241	0.0125	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012
INDONESIA RUP	21.4831	0.4544	0.4548	40.3405	39.5044	0.0474	0.0509	0.0173	0.0509	0.0173	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017	0.0017
THAILAND BATH	1.4124	0.2666	0.2722	2.6522	2.5873	0.0276	0.0295	0.0100	0.0295	0.0100	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010
PHILIPPINE PESO	0.8534	0.0181	0.0184	1.6026	1.5563	0.0018	0.0019	0.0006	0.0019	0.0006	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
VIETNAM DONG	2.3781	0.4488	0.4584	4.4584	4.3584	0.0448	0.0474	0.0158	0.0474	0.0158	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016
LAOS KIP	1.9520	0.3854	0.3782	3.6554	3.5854	0.0395	0.0421	0.0140	0.0421	0.0140	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014	0.0014
MYANMAR KYAT	6.0008	1.1500	1.1521	15.0239	14.7125	0.1507	0.1557	0.0518	0.1557	0.0518	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052	0.0052
NEPAL RUPEE	1.6185	0.3035	0.3120	3.0392	2.9762	0.0317	0.0347	0.0125	0.0347	0.0125	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013
AFGHAN AFGANI	2.6879	0.5073	0.5181	5.0472	4.9426	0.0526	0.0566	0.0193	0.0566	0.0193	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019
PAKISTAN RUPEE	10.9282	0.2056	0.2068	20.5228	20.0974	0.0215	0.0234	0.0080	0.0234	0.0080	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008
INDONESIA RUP	23.6170	0.4571	0.4582	44.3476	43.4284	0.0452	0.0481	0.0163	0.0481	0.0163	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016
THAILAND BATH	48.2020	0.2859	0.2868	48.3807	47.4589	0.0285	0.0315	0.0110	0.0315	0.0110	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011	0.0011
PHILIPPINE PESO	2.2278	0.4234	0.4254	4.1833	4.0966	0.0432	0.0462	0.0158	0.0462	0.0158	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016
VIETNAM DONG	3.9336	0.7424	0.7582	7.3665	7.2334	0.0742	0.0789	0.0264	0.0789	0.0264	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026	0.0026
LAOS KIP	2.6836	0.5085	0.5173	5.0393	4.9343	0.0518	0.0558	0.0193	0.0558	0.0193	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019
MYANMAR KYAT	16.7825	3.1673	3.2348	31.5139	30.8607	0.3159	0.3363	0.1250	0.3363	0.1250	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125	0.0125
NEPAL RUPEE	2.1459	0.4050	0.4136	4.0285	3.9460	0.0413	0.0443	0.0158	0.0443	0.0158	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016	0.0016
AFGHAN AFGANI	1.2187	0.2302	0.2351	2.2804	2.2429	0.0232	0.0252	0.0090	0.0252	0.0090	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009	0.0009

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	YEMEN RIAL	INDONESIA RUP	THAILAND BATH	PHILIPPINE PESO	VIETNAM DONG	LAOS KIP	MYANMAR KYAT	NEPAL RUPEE
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6650	0.9639	0.7236	0.1765	0.0827	0.0255	0.0100	0.0100	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
EURO	0.6042	1.0000	0.3588	0.4372	0.1087	0.0527	0.0173	0.0070	0.0070	0.0007	0.0007	0.0007	0.0007
SWISS FRANC	1.0387	2.7885	1.0000	1.2183	0.2872	0.1483	0.0483	0.0193	0.0193	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019
GERMAN MARK	1.3520	2.2372	0.8268	1.0000	0.2100	0.1000	0.0333	0.0133	0.0133	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013
FRANCE FRANC	114.5900	186.6455	65.0544	82.9161	20.2291	10.0000	0.0215	0.0087	0.0087	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008	0.0008
YEMEN RIAL	1.9030	3.1495	1.1302	1.3770	0.3359	1.6007	0.0527	0.0215	0.0215	0.0021	0.0021	0.0021	0.0021
INDONESIA RUP	17.7378	12.9082	4.2868	5.5991	1.3880	6.5287	0.0255	0.0100	0.0100	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010	0.0010
THAILAND BATH	19.7208	27.6729	8.9310	12.0990	2.9518	14.3918	0.0481	0.0193	0.0193	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019	0.0019
PHILIPPINE PESO	34.8350	57.6818	20.9688	26.2062	6.1496	30.3697	0.0163	0.0067	0.0067	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006
VIETNAM DONG	1.5774	2.6104	0.9388	1.1413	0.2784	1.3765	0.0016	0.0006	0.0006	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
LAOS KIP	2.7850	4.5092	1.6541	2.0152	0.4916	2.4304	0.0026	0.0010	0.0010	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
MYANMAR KYAT	1.9000	3.1445	1.1285	1.3748	0.3354	1.5861	0.0019	0.0007	0.0007	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
NEPAL RUPEE	11.8820	19.8847	7.0571	8.5977	2.0976	10.3691	0.0125	0.0048	0.0048	0.0004	0.0004	0.0004	0.0004
AFGHAN AFGANI	1.5183	2.5144	0.9024	1.0963	0.2682	1.3259	0.0016	0.0006	0.0006	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
PAKISTAN RUPEE	0.8636	1.4232	0.5129	0.6249	0.1524	0.7536	0.0009	0.0003	0.0003	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Number of tourists rise by 13.13 per cent

THE NUMBER of tourists visiting Jordan from January until November of 1998 increased by 13.13 per cent as the total reached 1,189,216 persons compared to 1,051,199 persons during the same period in 1997, according to statistics obtained from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Tourists coming from European countries, the Americas and other countries accounted for 28.55 per cent of the total, a drop of 7.53 per cent from the level reached in 1997. Tourists coming from the Arab Gulf states accounted for 61.97 per cent and from Israel 9.48 per cent.

The statistics revealed that income from tourism during the first ten months of 1998 amounted to JD461.6 million, 9.9 per cent more than the JD419.9 million earned during the same period of 1997. Jordanians, meanwhile, were estimated to have spent around JD245.2 million between January and November of last year, 14.2 per cent higher than the amount spent in the first 10 months of 1997. The spending covered tourism, medical and educational expenses.

The aforementioned figures work out into a surplus of JD216.4 million from tourism during the first ten months of 1998. The tourism income for the whole of 1997 amounted to JD548.8 million which represented 11 per cent of the gross domestic product for that year.

A breakdown by the port of entry, the statistics showed that 81.8 per cent of the visitors or 973,404 persons arrived by land. Most were Gulf Arabs who accounted for 70.2 per cent of those who came by land. Israelis came in second place (11.4 per cent) and the remaining 10.2 per cent were Europeans.

Arrivals by aircraft totalled 190,136 or 16 per cent of the overall number of tourists. Europeans accounted for 48.5 per cent of

the tourists who came through the airports. Tourists from the Arab Gulf ranked second with a 24.5 per cent and third were the Americas with 20.19 per cent.

Only 2.2 per cent of all the tourists, or 25,676 visitors, came by sea. Most of the arrivals in this category were from Europe (48.2 per cent) followed by Arab Gulf states and the Americas for 26.1 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. The remaining 11.6 per cent were from other countries.

Geographically, tourists from the Americas represented 8.52 per cent of the total number of tourists. Most of the tourists came from the United States which accounted for 89.71 per cent or 81,760 tourists. Canadians represented 11.70 per cent of the America tourists or 11,853 persons. The U.S. and Canadian numbers were 2.83 per cent and 8.83 per cent respectively, higher than the numbers recorded in 1997. Overall, the total number of tourists from the Americas was 101,297 persons during the first ten months of last year compared to 99,675 persons during the same period of 1997, an increase of 1.63 per cent.

The number of tourists coming from European countries declined by 8.01 per cent from 222,180 persons during the first ten months of 1997 to 204,377 persons during the same period of last year. They, however, accounted for 17.19 per cent of the total number of tourists. The number of visitors from Poland, Spain, Italy and Sweden increased last year by 52.89 per cent, 32.10 per cent, 8.65 per cent and 5.84 per cent respectively, but the number of tourists from Germany, Austria, Britain and France dropped by 29.83 per cent, 28.50 per cent, 16.24 per cent and 1.30 per cent respectively (Al Ra'i).

AFM brushes aside political developments

AMMAN (R) — Jordanian shares rose Saturday in brisk post-holiday business apparently unmoved by a wait-and-see mood gripping the country as it awaits political developments, dealers said.

The official Amman Financial Markets (AFM) 60-share index rose 0.93 per cent to 177.66 points in turnover of JD1.46 million (\$2 million) in the first trading session since last Saturday.

Dealers said the bourse saw active trade at the end of a week-long holiday to mark 'Eid Al Fitr' feast which included an extra one day to celebrate King

Hussein's return last Tuesday after a six-month absence abroad.

The market brushed aside the state of anticipation which is keeping many Jordanians in suspense as they await imminent news of the replacement of Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan as heir designate.

Some brokers cited healthy foreign buying on traditional blue-chip industries which led the broad market advances, helping to attract local interest from a mix of institutional buyers and floor trade speculators.

"The market was unaffected by the political changes that could happen," said

Amer Al Muasher, head of foreign investments at National Securities.

Among the busiest transactions of the day were the two mining blue-chips, Arab Potash and Jordan Phosphate Mines, rising sharply by JD0.18 to JD3.75 and JD0.09 to JD1.97 respectively.

The potash firm's turnover of JD738,604 accounted for nearly half the day's volume, mainly a bloc deal said to be a GDR cancellation, brokers said.

But blue-chip drug firm, Arab Pharmaceutical Manufacturing, shed JD0.04 to JD2.91 after shares worth JD52,566

changed hands in locally driven trade.

Jordan Electric Power, a recent favourite among local speculators, was unchanged at JD1.73 after shares worth JD116,278 changed hands in one of the busiest transactions of the day.

Jordan Cement Factories, rose JD0.12 to close JD3.57 in JD63,502 worth of trade, mostly by local speculators after foreign fund buying petered out.

The cement stock's foreign ownership reached close to its permissible 50 per cent ceiling after weeks of mainly global fund buying triggered by a landmark

government sale of a major stake last November to a French cement producer.

In contrast to busy trade in industrials, the banking sector was quieter with market heavy weight Arab Bank rising a modest JD0.25 to close JD217.25 after 300 shares changed hands.

Housing Bank rose a slight JD0.05 to JD2.80 in deals worth a total of JD55,583.

Gaining shares outnumbered losers by 16 to 8 and 12 stock were unchanged. The independent Pearl Index of 45 best-performing shares rose 0.42 per cent to 82.67 points, 1.30 per cent higher from the end of last year.

A.F.M. TRADE Saturday, 23-01-99			
ACCESS 4646868			
Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	217.000	217.250	+0.12%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.440	1.440	0.00%
THE HOUSING BK	2.750	2.800	+1.82%
LO. KUWAIT BK	1.670	1.650	-0.60%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.690	1.690	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.550	0.530	-3.64%
BANKS INDEX	283.920	point =	+0.26%
INSURANCE			
AHLIA INS	1.160	1.160	0.00%
INSURANCE INDEX	126.370	point =	0.00%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.730	1.730	0.00%
AL-RAT	5.400	5.420	+0.37%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS. & UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.950	1.950	0.00%
SERVICES INDEX	111.480	point =	+0.09%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.450	3.570	+3.48%
PHOSPHATE	1.890	1.970	+4.79%
ARAB POTASH	3.570	3.750	+5.04%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.540	10.530	-0.09%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRIC	1.080	1.080	0.00%
WORSTED MILLS	5.470	5.450	-0.37%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.950	2.910	-1.36%
CERAMIC IND	1.170	1.140	-2.70%
JO. DAIRY	2.900	2.860	-1.38%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.220	1.230	+0.82%
DAK AL DAWA	5.160	5.200	+0.77%
INDUST. EAST COMPLEX	0.650	0.650	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.850	1.860	+0.54%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%
NTL IND	0.350	0.350	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.320	0.330	+3.13%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	0.930	0.970	+4.30%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.010	1.040	+2.97%
NTL CABLE	0.640	0.640	0.00%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.350	0.370	+5.71%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.300	1.300	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.650	0.680	+4.62%
NEW CAPLES	0.630	0.630	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.700	0.700	0.00%
INDUSTRY INDEX	89.450	point =	+2.95%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK (75	0.890	0.900	+1.12%
ARAB GERMAN INS	1.000	1.000	0.00%
UNION INVS. CORP	0.710	0.730	+2.82%
AL - EKAL	0.780	0.800	+2.56%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.550	0.550	-1.79%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.350	0.370	+5.71%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.430	0.410	-4.65%
NAMICO	0.250	0.250	0.00%
UNION TOBACCO	0.570	0.580	+1.75%
AL-RAT	3.000	3.010	+0.33%
UNION ENG. IND	0.540	0.550	+1.85%
UNION ENG. IND	0.200	0.210	+5.00%
INTL CERAMIC	0.390	0.390	0.00%
GRAND INDEX	177.66	point =	+0.93%

Jordan Bromine Company Limited holds planning meeting

RICHMOND, Virginia (J.T.) — A meeting of senior executives of Albemarle Holdings Company Limited, Jordan Dead Sea Industries (JODICO) and Arab Potash Company (APC) was held recently in Richmond, Virginia, to plan details for the first meetings of the general assembly and board of directors of their joint venture company, Jordan Bromine Company Limited, scheduled for Jan. 27, 1999.

Last October, a joint venture agreement was signed by the three companies to manufacture and market bromine and bromine derivatives

from a world-scale complex to be built in Jordan, near the Dead Sea. Jordan Bromine Company Limited will build units at Safi, Jordan, to produce bromine, tetrabromobisphenol-A flame retardant (TBBPA) and calcium bromide. The parties also decided to recommend to the board of directors of Jordan Bromine Company Limited that it incorporate a chlorine and potassium hydroxide plant as part of the joint venture.

At the meeting on Jan. 27, the three companies will conduct the first general assembly meeting, where, the board of directors will be elected.

Following the general assembly meeting, the board will meet and transact appropriate business matters arising from the formation of the joint venture company.

Following the meeting earlier this month, the three companies issued the following joint statement: "Jordan Bromine Company Limited was incorporated in Jordan on Jan. 11, 1999. We look forward to a long relationship. The joint venture is moving ahead and is on schedule to build the bromine and bromine derivatives facilities near the Dead Sea."

BritishBank wins title of best Global custodian in Jordan

AMMAN (J.T.) — HSBC BritishBank was again awarded the title of best Global custodian in Jordan by Global Custodian Magazine. The survey of Emerging Markets Agents Banks also commended HSBC BritishBank Jordan. Global Custodian Magazine is the leading industry commentator, making this a significant award to HSBC BritishBank.

Robert Bray, CEO HSBC BritishBank expressed his happiness on this accomplishment and commented that the bank will soon be upgrading to a fully automated system, which eliminates human intervention and increases the speed and the quality of service. The securities department was able to double its profits during 1998.

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Gambro to shed 1,000 jobs

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — The Swedish pharmaceutical group Gambro will start a two-year restructuring of its renal care business, involving the loss of more than 1,000 jobs, the company has said.

The aim of the restructuring is to improve profitability, "reinforce the group's commitment to quality renal care," and secure continued good growth, the company said.

There will also be a significant reduction in the product line to eliminate duplications, and a further reduction of warehouses.

The brand name COBE for renal care products will be discontinued.

"It is not yet decided where the jobs will be shed," Gambro information officer Bengt Moder told the TT news agency.

Gambro has clinics in Europe, North and South America and Asia.

Out of 6,000 people working within the renal care sector, 700 work in Sweden.

PROSCOP

CAST FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You are calm a friend's nervousness, since you've already been there and done that. You'll run into a similar situation this evening. Another person's problem becomes your chance to help. Your quick action turns a possible disaster into a story with a happy ending.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Someone in a position of authority is eyeing you for a promotion. It's obvious you can handle more responsibility. A friend may lean on you a little too much. Don't bail this person out of a jam. You know how to handle responsibility: now teach your friend how to do it, too.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) A friend keeps pushing you to go back to school. You may be resisting more out of habit than anything else. Actually, you'd love to go to school. There's something you could take that would help you in your present circumstances. It has to do with computers.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You may be feeling agitated, but don't worry — this is how it always feels when you're growing or learning. Change is definitely underway, and you're in the middle of it. People are expecting more of you than ever, with good reason. The amazing ideas you've been coming up with recently are attracting attention.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) A friend is trying to take off in about four directions at once. This person doesn't have your objectivity, however. That's where you can help. In a supportive way, point out the obvious pitfalls you see. Suggest that more time is necessary before making a decision.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) There are too many distractions, and each job seems to have top priority. Everyone you know thinks you should do it all. You've made other people depend on you more than you should have. Delegate some of the responsibility back to them.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) The challenge won't be in coming up with ideas, but in following through on them. Pick a couple of the best ones for now and save the rest for later. If you can disburse some of them to others, do so. You could keep about a dozen people busy.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) A loved one is practically in a dither. It looks like the plan isn't going right. Advise patience. By tomorrow, things will start to settle down. Remember the old adage about having to break a lot of eggs to make an omelette? Well, you're at the egg-breaking stage.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Several people are trying to understand what you're talking about. They're trying to let go of their old perceptions and see from your point of view. They admire you, because you always seem to be so happy and satisfied. Don't laugh if they make silly mistakes.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You're being asked to use skills you only recently acquired. Your experience doesn't really fit, but it's giving you the confidence you need. There's money to be made here, and you're going to be one of the people who makes it. Just do the next thing that's in front of you.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Romance will be easier for you today than it has been in quite a while. Money may still be something of a problem, however. That's annoying, since you'd like to take this person someplace special for dinner tonight. Have a picnic, instead, or a nice meal at home. Those can be even more romantic, with the right person.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You may be rearranging furniture or even moving to a new location. Or perhaps you're changing roommates. It's definitely the end of one phase and the beginning of another. Whether or not it's to your advantage is up to you. Trust your intuition, but also do the planning.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

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Andre Agassi advances easily, Serena Williams makes ugly exit

MELBOURNE (AP) — Andre Agassi, now the highest-ranked player in the Australian Open men's field, has left no room for argument so far, yielding only 17 games in three matches.

For Serena Williams, the line judge said "in," and the umpire said "out," on her second match point, and three games later she made a racket-flinging exit, booed by the crowd for her petulance.

Williams already was advancing toward the net for a victory handshake Saturday when the call turned against her.

"The match was actually mine at that point, so that's like having someone take it away from you," she said after her 6-2, 2-6, 9-7 loss to No. 14 seed Sandrine Testud of France.

She also thought she had been cheated on her first match point, at 5-4 in the third set, but added: "I don't think the bad calls got the best of me." The situation never would have arisen "if I had been attacking." In the round-of-16, Testud plays No. 6 seed Monica Seles, a four-time champion who pushed her record in Australian Opens to 31-0 by overcoming Belgian Sabine Appelmans 6-3, 3-6, 6-4.

Another four-time champion, No. 10 Steffi Graf, also had to struggle to beat Mary Joe Fernandez 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in two hours, bringing her record against the American to 17-0. Fernandez used her lob effectively to fend off Graf's attacks, but finally hit a backhand wide on the third match point.

For the first time in three matches, Agassi didn't score a 6-0.

He beat Czech player Jiri Novak 6-3, 6-2, 6-1, and said that "if I can keep that standard up, I like my chances against anybody." Only five men's seeds remain in the tournament, and Agassi is the top at No. 5. There's no chance of him meeting another seed before the semifinals, where No. 10 Yevgeny Kafelnikov might come through. Kafelnikov won 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 3-0 in the third round when Jim Courier retired with a groin pull.

On the Rebound Ace courts, in Melbourne's heat, Agassi said, "I can really beat a guy up physically because I control most of the points." Agassi has won three grand slam events, but none since the Australian in 1995. He fell as low as 141st in the rankings in 1997 before climbing back.

Last year, he said, "I played some great matches. I just didn't play those great match-



Andre Agassi of the USA hits a backhand return to Jiri Novak of the Czech Republic during their third round match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne Saturday. Agassi defeated Novak in straight sets 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 to advance to the round-of-sixteen (AFP photo)

es at the right time." He next meets 44th-ranked Vincent Spadea, a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 winner over Czech player Martin Damm, and a winner over Agassi in Cincinnati last August.

Agassi called the 24-year-old American "the kind of player that can even play better against better guys."

Kafelnikov, the 1996 French Open champion, rates the favorites here as himself, Agassi, No. 7 Karol Kucera, Sweden's Thomas Enqvist and South Africa's Wayne Ferreira. On Friday, Enqvist ousted third seed Patrick Rafter, the U.S. Open champion, and Ferreira outlasted No. 9 Richard Krajicek.

"I was missing motivation in 1998," Kafelnikov said. "I was kind of lost in space. ... I'm ready to win again, winning the big tournament, big matches, and under these circumstances I have to use my chance. This is the best opportunity I've ever had to win this event." Late last year, his wife gave birth to a girl.

he switched coaches and he took off a month without picking up his racket.

Kafelnikov's next opponent is Romanian Andrei Pavel, who struggled to a 3-6, 6-3, 2-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over 187th-ranked Paul Goldstein, the American newcomer who ousted eighth-seeded Greg Rusedski in the second round.

In women's matches, two-time defending champion Martina Hingis and 1995 winner Mary Pierce both won easily, and Anna Kournikova cut her double faults in half — serving just 14 — in a 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 victory over Germany's Andrea Glass.

Kournikova, who had served 31 double faults in her second-round victory, said, "I've improved with each match. I'm playing better and better." The 17-year-old Russian, seeded 12th, said she isn't worried about later, stronger opponents taking advantage of her recent serving problems.

"I'm going to take advantage of their weaknesses," said Kournikova, who next plays No. 7 seed Pierce.

Pierce beat Italian Rita Grande 6-2, 6-2, while Hingis, seeded second, needed just 48 minutes to oust promising Australian 15-year-old Jelena Dokic.

Hingis has lost only 11 games in six sets. She now meets No. 16 Amanda Coetzer of South Africa, a 6-3, 7-5 winner over Taiwan's Janet Lee.

Testud's victory put four French women into the last 16 for the first time at any grand slam event in the three-decade-old Open Era. She joined Pierce, Emilie Loit and Amelie Mauresmo.

But Loit and Mauresmo face each other in the fourth round.

Testud sympathized with Williams.

"She was a little upset. I would have been upset, too," she said.

When Williams was running to the net in triumph, Testud was pointing to the spot on the court and gesturing frantically to umpire Laura Ceccarelli of Italy.

"The ball was out. I could see the mark," Testud said.

Ceccarelli reversed the call, indicating it was wide, and the game went on at deuce.

Testud then held serve, broke on a double fault by Williams, and won the nearly two-hour match when Williams slapped a final backhand into the net. The 17-year-old American hurled her racket about 25 feet (8 metres) toward the net in disgust and left it there as she sulked in her chair.



Steffi Graf (R) of Germany and Mary Joe Fernandez of the USA shake hands as they begin to kiss at the end of their third round match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne 23 January. Graf defeated Fernandez 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 (AFP photo)

Tennis-Graf fights back to oust Fernandez

MELBOURNE (R) — Four times champion Steffi Graf regained the killer instinct to beat determined American veteran Mary Joe Fernandez 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 at the Australian Open on Saturday.

The victory earned Graf a fourth-round tie against in-form Austrian Barbara Schett, semifinalist at last week's Sydney International tournament.

Former world number four Fernandez managed to

pile the pressure on Graf's serve and groundstrokes in the first set, but the German mounted one of her trademark fightbacks.

Fernandez received treatment to her right elbow in the second set as Graf gained the ascendancy. The pair traded breaks in a tight final set but Graf got the upper hand to serve for the match at 5-4.

Fernandez bravely saved two match points from 0-40 down, but hit her last

return wide to send Graf through. The 29-year-old German won the last of her 21 grand slam titles at the U.S. Open in 1996, which was also the last year she won in Melbourne.

Graf said she had played a bit too tentatively, partly because she had been nervous. "I wish I would, but it's normal, especially when you're on centre court and it's a tight match," she said.



Anna Kournikova of Russia celebrates her win over Andrea Glass of Germany after their third round match at the 1999 Australian Open in Melbourne Saturday. Kournikova defeated Glass 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 (AFP photo)

Tennis players likely to get ranking points for Olympic victories

MELBOURNE. Australia (AP) — As part of efforts to attract the top tennis players to the Olympics, ranking points are likely to be offered for victories, the president of the International Tennis Federation said Saturday.

The women players have supported the Olympics wholeheartedly and in the 1996 games, "only two or three of the men you might want to play" didn't enter, Brian Tobin said. He mentioned Pete Sampras and Boris Becker.

"If players are not in their own mind convinced that an Olympic gold medal is a big deal, then that's their deci-

sion," he said at a news conference.

"But we have tried to take every opportunity to make it easier for the players," Tobin added.

The ITF is very close to agreement with the ATP men's tour on offering ranking points for both the Olympics and the Davis Cup under a new ranking system to be introduced in 2000, he said.

"I don't think that ranking points themselves are going to attract Pete Sampras, for example, to play in the Olympics. But I think it's fair for all the other players who perhaps give up a tournament or two to play in the

Olympics, or Davis Cup, that they don't suffer at the hands of other players who are winning points somewhere else," he said.

Sampras has cited the rigors of the regular tour for his limited Davis Cup appearances. He also is skipping the current Australian Open, claiming fatigue from efforts late last year to preserve his No. 1 ranking.

Tobin said the tennis program at the Olympics will be limited to 10 days, down from 12, so the players won't have to spend too much time away from the tour.

"We are trying to make it as player-friendly as we can,

because tennis players are used to the luxuries of life. I think they will find ... that the facilities there (Sydney Olympics) will be equal to the facilities at major tennis events," he said.

The Olympics are important to giving tennis a wider audience, and also bring revenues to help develop the sport, he added.

Tennis gained about \$3.2 million from the Atlanta games, which was passed on to national associations, he said.

"It's very important to the smaller nations that tennis is part of the Olympics," Tobin said.

He called tennis probably the most international of sports, with 201 nations represented in the ITF.

But he said team competition was unlikely to be included in the Olympics, because just a few nations would dominate it, and there were logistics and scheduling problems.

In 1996, Americans Andre Agassi and Lindsay Davenport were the Olympic singles champions.

"The recent surveys we have done are very encouraging," Tobin said. "All of the players said that representing their country and winning a gold medal is very appealing to them."

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	MERCURY RISING Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	ALWAD MAHROUS TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	SAEEDI AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ALWAD MAHROUS TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	LETHAL WEAPON 4 Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	MULAN Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Contract problems stalling Bears deal with McGinnis

LAKE FOREST, Illinois (AFP) — The Chicago Bears may have reached new heights of embarrassment.

The National Football League club Friday named Arizona Cardinals defensive coordinator Dave McGinnis as their new coach, and were set to formally introduce him at a news conference.

But McGinnis never signed a deal with the team and the news conference never came off due to a breakdown in negotiations.

"We had reached an agreement in principle," said Bears spokesperson Bryan Harlan. "But some parts of the contract are not able to be resolved at this

time. There will be no announcement today, but the parties will resume talking tonight."

McGinnis, a former linebackers coach under Mike Ditka and Dave Wannstedt in Chicago, walked out of the Bears' practice facility after talks broke off.

Wannstedt was fired last month after the Bears finished 4-12 for the second straight season.

Green Bay Packers offensive coordinator Sherman Lewis, Buffalo Bills offensive coordinator Joe Pendry, Kansas City Chiefs defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham and Jacksonville Jaguars defensive coordinator Dick Jauron were among the can-

didates for the Bears' job. Later in the day, the Chiefs named Cunningham as their new coach.

Cunningham's appointment came 11 days after the surprising resignation of Marty Schottenheimer after 10 seasons with the club.

General manager Carl Peterson said he interviewed seven or eight candidates before selecting Cunningham, who has 18 years of NFL experience but has never been a head coach on any level.

"I have looked forward to this day more than anything," Cunningham said. "I have sat through meeting after meeting and worked under many coaches. I am ready."

Klinsmann won't back Germany's Cup bid — paper

BONN (R) — Juergen Klinsmann will no longer work as an ambassador for the German Soccer Federation's (DFB) campaign to host the 2006 World Cup, a Munich newspaper reported on Saturday.

The TZ daily reported that Klinsmann was annoyed the DFB had declined to give him a farewell charity match. Former Germany captain Klinsmann appeared 108 times for his country and led the team to their 1996 European championship triumph.

The newspaper said Klinsmann had turned down the DFB's offer of a 10-minute farewell ceremony during a match between Germany and

the United States in Jacksonville, Florida, on February 6.

"I'm not going," Klinsmann was quoted saying. "I'll watch it on television."

Klinsmann was to work with Franz Beckenbauer and former striker Rudi Voeller as international ambassadors to promote Germany's bid to host the 2006 World Cup finals. Klinsmann was quoted as saying he suspected Beckenbauer, a DFB vice-president and president of Bayern Munich, was behind the DFB's decision earlier this month to deny Klinsmann a farewell match.

"Maybe when I played in Bayern I stepped on Franz' feet too often,"

Klinsmann said. "Maybe I was the only player he had a problem with."

On Thursday, the president of VfB Stuttgart, Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, offered Klinsmann a farewell match in Stuttgart, where he began his career and played between 1984 and 1989.

English premier league Tottenham Hotspur, with whom Klinsmann had two spells, also offered the striker a farewell charity match at the end of the season.

Klinsmann's last international was Germany's 3-0 defeat by Croatia in the World Cup quarter-finals last July.

McDyess, Divac and Smith sign, Gugliotta doesn't

NEW YORK (AP) — The signing of Antonio McDyess was expected to unleash a domino effect, but Tom Gugliotta didn't fall into place.

McDyess, the player considered the top free agent on the National Basketball Association market, finally made up his mind Friday and signed with the Denver Nuggets despite a last-minute lobbying effort by three members of the Phoenix Suns.

Gugliotta then left Phoenix without signing a contract and headed to Minnesota to meet with Timberwolves owner Glen Taylor.

No one was certain what Gugliotta's next move would be, from re-signing with Minnesota to signing with Phoenix to being involved in a sign-and-trade deal that could send him somewhere else.

"We had a lot of positive feedback," Phoenix coach Danny Ainge joked, "but, hey, I had a year of positive feedback from McDyess, too."

Two other premier free agents signed with new teams, Vlade Divac moving to the Sacramento Kings and Joe Smith going to the Timberwolves, and now it looks like the Suns could be the biggest losers of the post-lockout frenzy if they wind up losing Gugliotta, too.

"I'm very nervous, no question about it," Ainge said. "We're taking a little bit of a gamble." Rod Strickland remained a no-show Friday as the Washington Wizards started three-day workouts.

The point guard and the Wizards remain far apart on a new contract. Strickland and agent David Falk originally demanded \$ 65 million over five years but reportedly lowered that to \$ 55 million Thursday. The Wizards have offered about \$ 30 million over three years.

Washington executive vice president and general manager Wes Unseld said both sides will continue talking. The pace of player move-

ment stayed steady Thursday, with three more trades and dozens of signings.

Atlanta re-signed Christian Lattin and dealt him to Detroit for Scott Pollard and a draft pick.

Chicago re-signed Steve Kerr and traded him to San Antonio for Chuck Person and a conditional first-round pick.

Detroit traded the draft rights to Bonzi Wells to the Portland Trail Blazers for a future first-round pick.

A few teams, such as Sacramento and Detroit, made all their major moves practically at once, while other teams filled out their training camp rosters or added an extra part here or there.

Smith, who reportedly turned down \$ 80 million from Golden State last season before he was dealt to Philadelphia, signed a one-year deal with Minnesota for \$ 1.75 million.

Detroit re-signed two of its own free agents, Jerry Stackhouse and Joe Dumars, and added free agents Loy Vaught and Jud Buechler.

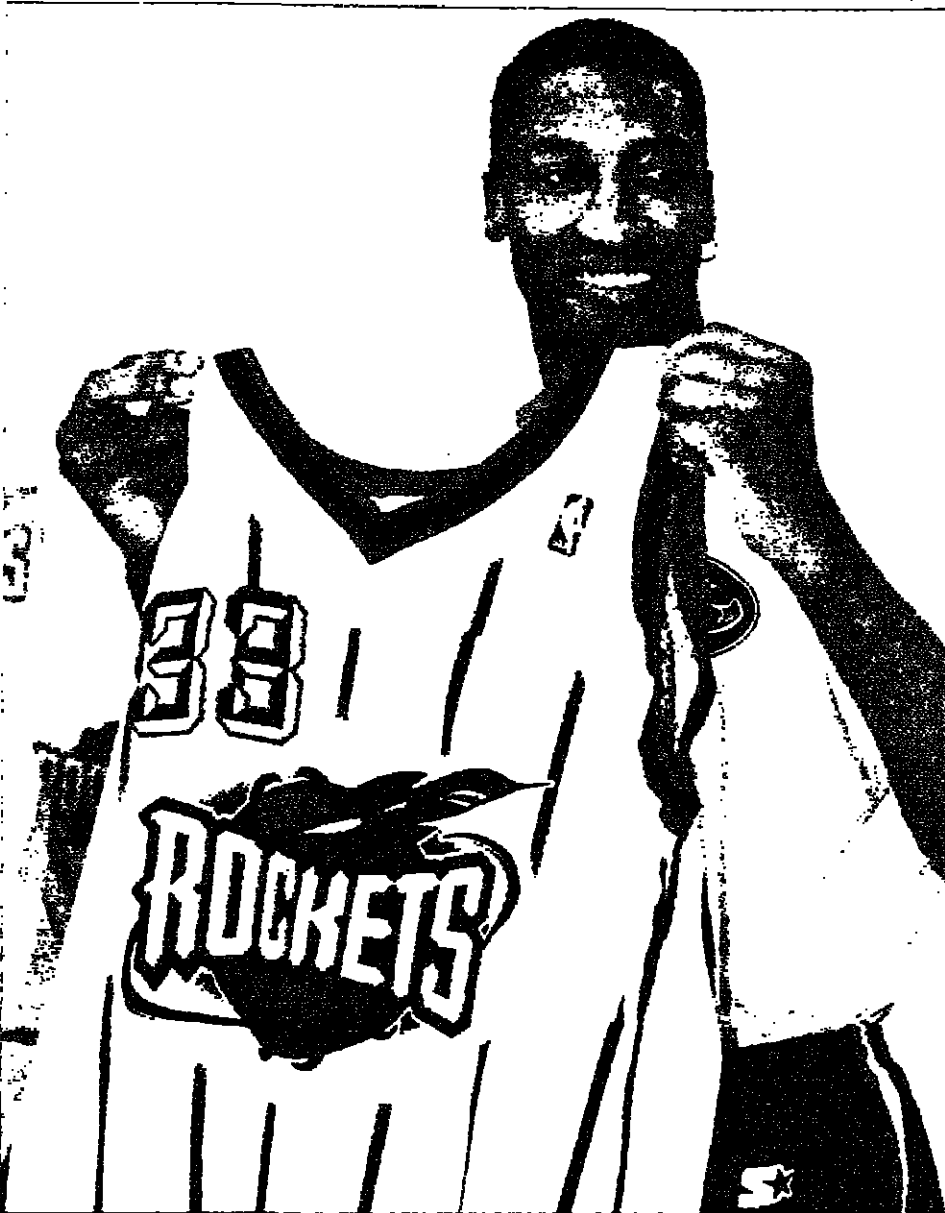
Sacramento gave Divac \$ 62.5 million, welcomed Chris Webber to camp and found a way to re-sign Corliss Williamson.

Divac, one of just five active NBA players with 8,000 career points, 5,000 rebounds, 1,500 assists and 1,000 blocks, said he wants to break a streak of 15 consecutive losing seasons by the Kings — a league record.

"That's one of the biggest challenges in my career now, to make Sacramento a competitive team," he said. "It's a very big challenge, and I like challenges."

The Indiana Pacers re-signed Rik Smits, giving him a contract that will average a reported \$ 14 million, the Dallas Mavericks signed Suns free agent center Greg Anthony, Minnesota signed guard Malik Sealy, the Knicks signed forward Kurt Thomas, Vancouver signed center Cherokee Parks and Utah brought back Thurl Bailey.

The sign-and-trade deals Seattle signed free agent for-



Former Chicago Bulls forward Scottie Pippen holds up his new jersey after officially being traded to the Houston Rockets, Friday. Pippen, who was acquired from the Chicago Bulls in exchange for forward Roy Rogers and a future second round draft pick, will join the Rockets after 11 distinguished seasons with the Bulls (Reuters photo)

ward Billy Owens, San Antonio signed forwards Mario Elie and Jerome Kersey, the Trail Blazers signed point guard Greg Anthony, Minnesota signed guard Malik Sealy, the Knicks signed forward Kurt Thomas, Vancouver signed center Cherokee Parks and Utah brought back Thurl Bailey.

The sign-and-trade deals involving Scottie Pippen (to Houston) and Luc Longley (to Phoenix) still had not been cleared by the league office.

In New York, Latrell Sprewell met with commissioner David Stern and was reinstated. He was expected to begin practicing with the Knicks on Saturday night.

The Hornets announced that Glen Rice had undergone successful surgery to remove bone chips from his elbow. He will be out 6-8 weeks.

The Miami Heat brought veteran shooting guard Terry Porter into camp, and he immediately found himself a possible starter after it was learned that last season's starter, Voshon Lenard, will be out 8-10 weeks with a stress fracture in his left leg.

Jordan Times E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Coates defends Sydney bid payments

SYDNEY (R) — The man who won Sydney the right to host the 2000 Olympics acknowledged on Saturday that he had made a last-ditch funding offer to African delegates but said he had done nothing wrong. Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates said he had arranged sports funding totalling A\$1.9 million (\$1.2 million) for 13 African countries in the weeks before Sydney won its bid in 1993, fending off its main rival Beijing by just two votes, 45-43.

Injured Ortlieb announces retirement

KITZBUHEL, Austria (R) — Austria's injured former world and Olympic downhill champion Patrick Ortlieb said his 11-year career in Alpine skiing on Saturday. The 37-year-old veteran suffered a complicated compound fracture of his right thigh on Thursday in a crash during training on Kitzbuehel's notorious Streif piste.

Cavagnoud lands second win in three days

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy (R) — Regine Cavagnoud of France won an Alpine skiing World Cup super-G on Saturday, her second victory in the space of three days and her first success in the discipline. The 28-year-old, who on Thursday gained her first career win and became the first Frenchwoman to win a downhill in 17 years, won again on Cortina's Olympia delle Tofane piste in a provisional time of one minute 20.25 seconds.

Boro launch desperate effort to get Juninho

MIDDLESBROUGH, England (AFP) — English Premiership side Middlesbrough launched a last ditch effort Saturday to persuade Brazilian playmaker Juninho to return for a second stint at the club. "Boro chairman Steve Gibson, who along with coach Bryan Robson convinced the Brazilian international to join them in November 1995, flew to Spain in a bid to convince Juninho, who is currently at Atletico Madrid, to join them and not Premiership rivals Aston Villa. Middlesbrough have first option on Juninho, which was inserted in his contract when he left for Spain in the summer of 1997. But the signs are that Juninho is set to reject their offer and opt for the Premiership's joint-leaders. "I think Villa and I could be made for each other," Juninho said. "I'm very flattered by their interest — they play the sort of football that appeals to me. "I have been told all about John Gregory and the impact he has made at Villa Park and I'm confident I could work well with him," he added. Juninho was at Middlesbrough for only 18 months after his 4.75 million pound (\$7.5 million) move from Brazilian club Sao Paulo, but his influence was huge. He helped the club

to both the 1997 League and FA Cup finals in the same season, but ended up on the losing side on each occasion and eventually left for Spain after Middlesbrough were relegated from the Premiership.

Ronaldo to miss match against Cagliari

MILAN, Italy (AFP) — Injury-plagued Brazilian international striker Ronaldo is set to miss Inter Milan's Italian league match against Cagliari on Sunday. Ronaldo has been suffering persistent pain from a knee injury and has the blessing of the club's coaching staff to rest for several days. He trained only lightly at the club's Appiano Gentile training camp on Friday, but did not touch a ball. Inter officials hope Ronaldo will return to action for their Italian Cup quarter-final, second-leg match against Lazio on Wednesday night at San Siro. Lazio won the first-leg match 2-1.

Kuwaiti footballer named best player in asia in December

KUWAIT (KUNA) — The Asian Football Federation has chosen Friday Faraj Laheeb, a Kuwaiti striker, as the best Asian footballer for last month. Laheeb, 19, who plays in Kuwait club has just joined the national team was named the scorer of the Asian Football Tournament that was held in Bangkok last month with nine goals in eight matches. Saad Al-Houti, board member of the Kuwait club, voiced content over the Asian Federation selection and said as long as there are the suitable financial, technical and administrative support, Kuwaitis will continue their achievements in sports in the future. The federations best team and coach awards go to Iran and their manager.

Lebanon to host Asian Cup football tournament 2000

BEIRUT (KUNA) — Lebanon decided Friday to host Asian Nations Cup football tournament next year, ending doubts about holding the competitions in Beirut. Information Minister Anwar Al-Khalil, speaking to reporters after a cabinet session, said the decision was irreversible and we are about to secure (resources for) the need money despite the governments tight-belt policy. Khalil said the cabinet, however, decided to replace board members of the Casino de Liban, the Finance Bank, the National Middle East Airlines and Anira Company. Most of the members are pro former premier Rafik Al-Hariri. Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Salim Al-Hoss is working with Finance Minister George Al-Qarn to finalise the 1999 draft law budget before the end of February.

Corruption hearing starts as scandal rages

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (R) — Olympic chiefs started a major corruption hearing behind locked doors at their headquarters on Saturday but were unable to stop a bribery scandal raging on outside.

An investigating committee of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) began a meeting at which they will question some of the 13 members accused of taking \$600,000 worth of goods and services from Salt Lake City when it won the right to stage the 2002 Winter Games.

The IOC, which usually allows journalists into its headquarters during meetings, locked its building on the banks of Lake Geneva and placed security guards and barriers to keep back the many reporters waiting outside.

The Salt Lake affair is the biggest scandal to hit the IOC since Ben Johnson's positive

test at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the political boycotts of the 1970s and 1980s. It threatens the whole future of the IOC and its image.

Some of the members could be expelled from the organisation if they are found guilty of taking gifts worth more than \$150 — the limit under Olympic rules — before they voted in 1995 to give the Games to Salt Lake.

Committee chiefs would not comment as they entered the building but some of the IOC members accused of being involved in the corruption were seen entering the headquarters during the meeting.

They were driven past reporters in cars into an car park under the headquarters and kept out of the eye of television cameras and photographers.

The committee is due to

report its findings on Salt Lake to the IOC's ruling executive board on Sunday. It has been investigating alleged bribery relating only to the U.S. city but the investigation could well be expanded to other bidding campaigns.

The scandal took a new turn just before the meeting when Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates said in Sydney he had arranged sports funding totalling A\$1.9 million (\$1.2 million) for 11 African countries in the weeks before Sydney won its bid in 1993 for the 2000 Summer Games, fending off its main rival Beijing by just two votes, 45-43.

On the eve of the vote, Coates dined with Kenyan IOC delegate Charles Mukora and Ugandan Francis Nyangweso and promised to pay their national Olympic Committees a total \$35,000

each to sponsor sports projects.

With all the accusations flying, Australia's IOC executive board member Kevan Gosper said on Saturday he hoped the executive board would give their full backing to the decisions to choose Salt Lake and Sydney when it meets on Sunday.

"Then any uncertainty about the location of those Games is taken away," Gosper told reporters in Lausanne.

The Sydney issue is set to come up at the executive board meeting on Sunday. Gosper said he had talked to Coates about his comments and he believed the officers were not bribes.

"John Coates has been up front. He was simply saying you never give up on winning support for a voter," Gosper said.

Boro launch desperate effort to get Juninho

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U.S. to promote Iraqi opposition groups in international media

WASHINGTON (R) — As part of its efforts to bolster Iraqi opposition groups, the United States plans to promote them in the media as the authentic voice of the Iraqi people, a senior U.S. official said on Friday.

But the official, Bruce Reidel of the White House National Security Council, acknowledged many of the groups had serious differences that hindered their ability to work together.

Reidel, President Bill Clinton's special assistant for Near East and South Asian affairs, briefed reporters at the U.S. Foreign Press Centre.

"I think that's an early place where we will work with these groups, to try and get them more access to the international media and a better opportunity to speak for the Iraqi people," he said.

The Clinton administration on Tuesday designated seven Iraqi opposition groups as eligible for U.S. aid, including the Tehran-based coalition which dominates Shiite Muslim resistance to the government.

It acted as part of a modified U.S. policy designed not only to contain Iraqi President Saddam Hussein with sanctions and military force but also to strengthen opposition groups who could help force his ouster.

In a report to Congress, the administration certified the seven groups were committed to democratic values, human rights, Iraq's territorial integrity and peaceful ties with its neighbours.

Clinton was fulfilling a requirement in last year's

Iraq Liberation Act, which provided \$97 million for approved Iraqi opposition groups, mostly in the form of military materiel from Pentagon surpluses.

The designation is the first step toward disbursing the assistance, but U.S. officials say it may be some time before they decide the time is right to start paying out.

The seven groups include the Iraqi National Congress (INC), probably the best known of the mainstream coalitions, the two main Kurdish groups — the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) — and the Tehran-based Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

Reidel said Washington had made good progress in trying to promote reconciliation between the two main Kurdish groups.

They are "engaged in a serious dialogue about resolving their differences and increasing their cooperation in the north" of Iraq, where the United States and its allies maintain a protected zone, he said.

He said the administration would bring the other Iraqi groups together in a meeting, but details were not yet set.

"We recognise that many of these groups still have differences with each other and have not yet reached agreement on how to work together," he said.

He said the important thing was for the groups to receive U.S. assistance so they could develop as an

"alternative voice."

"It's a terrible shame that the only voice the world hears speaking for Iraq are the spokesmen for Saddam's regime," he said. "Those people don't speak for Iraqis. They speak for a small narrow regime which oppresses the Iraqi people."

Groups like the Iraqi National Congress "can be an effective alternative so the world opinion can hear what other Iraqis think and what they think about this regime," he said.

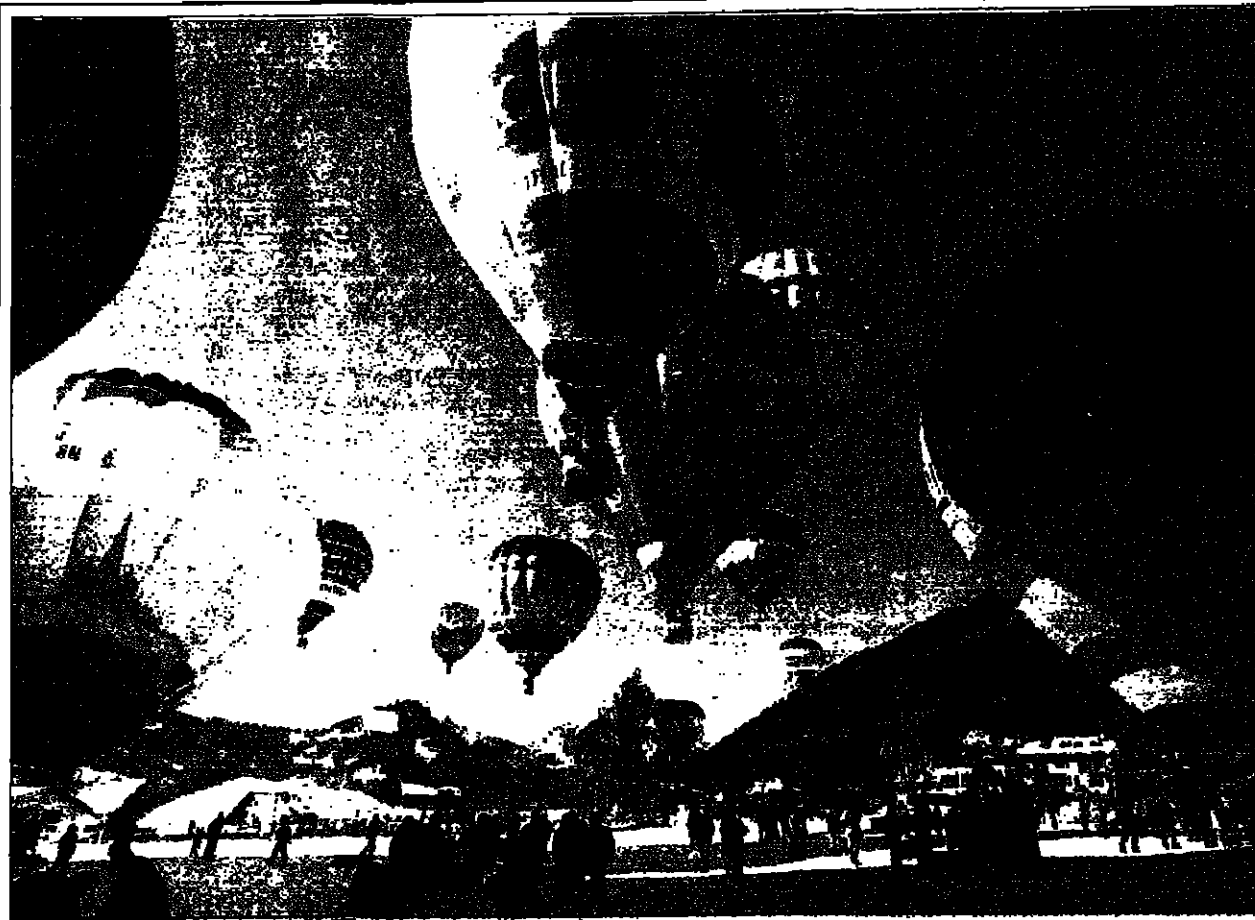
He stressed that because Saddam's regime has a history of brutally repressing critics, the United States would work with opposition groups "piece by piece in an integrated approach."

SCIRI, Iraq's main Shiite Muslim opposition group, on Thursday rejected the aid offer from Washington. A spokesman said this was an "incorrect way" to deal with the opposition.

Reidel said the United States had had a dialogue with the group and hoped that would continue.

"I think it is a measure of our effort to be credible on this, that a group which is as well established as the SCIRI would be made theoretically eligible [for U.S. aid]. Whether they want it or not in the future is a question that we will resolve with them as time goes on," he said.

SCIRI was the most surprising choice on the U.S. list. It is led by Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Al Hakim, a Shiite Muslim cleric who opposes outside intervention to oust Saddam.



Hot-air balloons take off into the sky of the resort of Chateau d'Oex, Switzerland, on Saturday for the 21st 'week of ballooning' festival which will be held from January 23 to 31 (AP photo)

U.N. Security Council continues discussion over Iraq inspections

UNITED NATIONS (Agencies) — The U.N. Security Council appeared Friday to have inched toward ending a stalemate on how to inspect Iraq's disarmament after December's U.S.-British air strikes, diplomats said.

The council's 15 members are discussing a "procedural" proposal presented by Canada and amended by Argentina to end the stalemate stemming from deep disagreements on the issue within the U.N. body, diplomats reported.

Brazilian Ambassador Celso Amorim, the council's president, told reporters after a closed-door meeting that "on several issues, I think it will be possible to approximate positions."

"I have the impression we are on the good track," he added. However, "it is not clear yet," he said, adding that discussions will resume Monday afternoon.

"We're actually making

good progress," said British Ambassador Jeremy Greenstock.

Canada's proposal would have Iraq's disarmament process assessed at a joint meeting of UNSCOM, the existing U.N. inspection team, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The meeting would be chaired, not by UNSCOM chief Richard Butler, but by Jayantha Dhanapala, a top U.N. disarmament official.

Argentina Ambassador Fernando Petrella proposed that Amorim chair the UNSCOM-IAEA meeting. Canada accepted the Argentine proposal, as did a clear majority of the council, said "Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler.

"In the majority's view, and including the United Kingdom's view, it's a entirely sensible way of moving forward," said Britain's Greenstock. "I think we will go looking for unanimity on that proposal

because it just got quite a lot of support," he added.

The council did not debate proposals by France and Russia to lift the embargo and install a new system for inspecting Iraqi disarmament, diplomats said.

Meanwhile, the head of the U.N. Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Friday called for the Iraq weapons inspection process to be handed over to international agencies rather than bodies of the U.N. Security Council.

Mohammad Al Baradei, head of the IAEA, sent the 15 members of the U.N. Security Council an unofficial document suggesting that "competent international agencies" conduct the Iraq weapons inspections rather than "subsidiary bodies of the Security Council."

"This would not weaken the authority of the inspecting bodies, but rather strengthen it," he said.

UNSCOM is a special

commission of the council. The 15 members of the council are locked in a stalemate over Iraq inspections, with the United States wanting UNSCOM to continue the work, and France and Russia wanting it out of the picture due to fierce opposition from Baghdad after December's British-U.S. air strikes. Russia prefers IAEA and other U.N. agencies continue the work.

Baghdad has often compared IAEA's "professionalism" to UNSCOM's "nest of spies."

Al Baradei calls his suggestion a reflection on "the next chapter of verification in Iraq."

The Vienna-based IAEA is concerned with looking for evidence of nuclear potential in Iraq, while UNSCOM inspectors are charged with looking for chemical and biological material.

All inspectors pulled out of Iraq before the December air strikes.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Algerian rebels kill 10 militiamen'

ALGIERS (R) — Islamist rebels killed 10 pro-government militiamen in two attacks south of Algiers, a local newspaper said on Saturday. They ambushed the village-based militiamen, known as Patriots, killing six of them and seriously wounding another in Sidi Al Kebir hamlet in Blida province, 50 km south of Algiers. Le Quotidien d'Oran reported. The ambush took place on Thursday, when rebels cut the throats of five civilians in Sidi Al Kebir village in a separate attack, it said. Four other Patriots were killed a day earlier in Boufarik area in the same province in a battle with rebels, the daily added. The government has armed thousands of volunteers, officially called Patriots, to guard villages against Islamist militants.

Iranian daily ordered closed

TEHRAN (AFP) — A newspaper run by a daughter of former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has been banned for two weeks for allegedly defaming a security official, the daily announced Saturday. Zan (Woman) daily, run by moderate MP and feminist activist Faezeh Hashemi, was ordered closed from Jan. 24 to February 7 by a Tehran court, it said. The paper has been plagued by several lawsuits, mainly one filed by police security chief General Mohammad Naghdi after he was accused by the daily of participating in an attack on two senior government officials by extremists in September.

'Search for Ocalan shifts'

ANKARA (AFP) — The Turkish secret service has asked its Azeri counterparts to look into reports that Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan may be hiding out in the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. A Turkish newspaper reported Saturday. Citing secret service sources, the Radikal daily said Ocalan was spirited out of Russia late Thursday, a day before Russian authorities announced the rebel leader was "not currently" in Russian territory. According to these sources, Ocalan was flown first to the Armenian capital Yerevan and then on to Karabakh, the paper said. Radikal pointed out that Turkish President Suleyman Demirel has been visiting Azeri President Heydar Aliyev, who is undergoing treatment in an Ankara hospital, more frequently than required by the laws of hospitality.

South Sudan group registers as party

KHARTOUM (R) — A group of southern Sudanese former rebel factions which signed a 1997 peace accord with Khartoum applied on Saturday to become a political party under a new law reinstating the multi-party system in Sudan. The United Democratic Salvation Front (UDSF) became the 17th group to register since the new law took effect on Jan. 1 permitting political parties, officials said. Analysts said the UDSF was expected to be a popular party in southern Sudan because it wants southern self-determination through an internationally supervised referendum. Rick Machar, who heads a council put in place by Khartoum to govern the south, is the UDSF leader.

Taliban sees rulers erring on beard issue

KABUL (R) — A senior official of Afghanistan's Taliban government said on Saturday some Muslim rulers were violating Islamic injunctions to grow long beards. "Growing a beard is an order of Prophet [Mohammad]," Maulvi Shamsuddin, deputy minister of Taliban's religious police, told reporters. But he said: "Many Muslims, some heads of Islamic states, including that of Saudi Arabia, do not abide by this order." The Taliban, which controls more than 90 per cent of the war-torn country it wants to turn into a purist Islamic state, has ordered men to grow beards to the size of a fist. It has also banned television and music, and barred women from outdoor work, except in the medical field, and from going out of their homes without wearing an all-enveloping burqa veil.

'Over 160,000 Iraqis died in 1998 due to U.N. embargo'

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Some 160,000 Iraqis died last year as a direct result of crippling U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq more than eight years ago, the health ministry said Saturday.

More than 71,000 children under the age of five were among the dead, the ministry said in a report published by the official INA news agency.

The children died mainly from infection of the lungs, chronic diarrhoea and malnutrition, while adults died from heart disease, kidney failure, hypertension and cancer.

Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak last week said more than 1.8 million Iraqis had died since 1990 due to the embargo, the Gulf War and repeated military strikes.

He said infant mortality had nearly quadrupled since sanctions were imposed in 1990, rising from 24 in every thousand in 1990 to its present rate of 98 in every thousand.

Total deaths among children younger than five stands at 8,600 per month compared to 1,600 per month before the Gulf War, the minister said.

ADEN (AFP) — The trial of six Britons charged with planning a bombing campaign in Yemen is ready to open now that investigators have completed their inquiries, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office said Saturday.

"The Aden province prosecutor's office has completed its inquiries concerning the six suspects with British passports who are accused of conspiring to commit acts of sabotage in Aden province," the spokesman said.

"The prosecutor's office will refer the case files to the magistrate's court in Sira [a district of the southern port city of Aden] Sunday," he told the official news agency SABA.

Shahid Butt, 33, Malik Nassar Harbra, 26, Samad Ahmad, 21, all from Birmingham, Ghulam Hussein, 25, from Luton, and Muhsin Ghalain, 18,

from London, were detained in Yemen last month. Yemeni authorities say a sixth Briton wanted by police, Mohammad Kamel Mustafa, is on the run.

The five Britons in custody were charged earlier this month with "association with armed groups, with a criminal plan to commit murder, explosion and destruction and possession of weapons."

A Yemeni official said the men had also been charged with possession of "international communications devices, as well as starting to commit acts of sabotage against Yemeni and foreign interests in Aden."

A seventh man, an Arab named Amer Abdul Rahman, was also charged with the same offence.

The lawyer for the six men in custody said he had formally met his clients Saturday for the first time

since their arrest 30 days ago. "I had confidential access to my clients for the first time this morning and spoke with them for about two hours," Badr Basunaid told AFP. "Their spirits are high and they were in a good mood. They seemed very healthy and generally in good shape," he said.

He added that a trial date for the men, five Britons and an Arab national, had yet to be set. Basunaid had earlier been reported as saying that the trial was likely to start in early to mid-February.

He said he was pushing for the men to be transferred from the criminal investigation department building where they are currently being held to Aden's central prison.

"I will meet them again when there is any necessity," he said, but added that there was no further meeting scheduled yet. Basunaid had

briefly met and spoken to the six men when they were charged, but this was the first confidential meeting.

Yemeni authorities have linked the six to the kidnapping of a group of Western tourists last month in which three Britons and an Australian were killed when security forces mounted a rescue operation. They are accused of plotting to carry out a bombing spree on New Year's Eve, with the British consulate and an Anglican church among the targets.

The suspects are "the most dangerous band of mercenaries and agents prepared abroad to attack the security and stability of Yemen," Vice President Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi said Saturday, congratulating the security services for arresting them.

The men deny the charges and their families in Britain have protested their innocence.

Trial of six Britons charged with bomb plot set to open in Yemen

Palestinians call for boycott of goods from Jewish settlements

RAMALLAH (AFP) — The Palestinian cabinet issued a statement Saturday criticising Jewish settlement activities in Palestinian areas and calling for measures to be taken against them.

"The Palestinian leadership, in view of the current stale-

mate in the implementation of the Wye River accords is asking the European Union, the United States, Russia, Japan and economic groups to boycott products from Israeli settlements," the statement said.

The European Commission decided in May last year to

recommend that products from the settlements should be excluded from the EU's trade agreement with Israel, on the grounds that they had not originated in territory legally recognised as part of Israel.

The recommendation,

which was not implemented, prompted angry reactions from settlers who said the policy was "reminiscent of the lists of Jews drawn up during the Nazi era."

The Palestinian cabinet statement also attacked the recent increase in settlement

activity. "The Palestinian leadership cannot accept the stalemate and increase of settlement activity on our land as if all signed agreements have lost meaning and become a cover for occupation and settlements," the statement added.

Police break up Tehran rally in support of murdered writers

TEHRAN (AFP) — Police forcibly dispersed a demonstration here on Saturday in memory of two writers who were murdered in Iran last month, witnesses said.

Several hundred people had taken part in the rally in front of the Hassan Mosque in north Tehran,

where they had earlier gathered to commemorate the 40th day since the deaths of Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Pouyandeh.

Police beat up some protesters with batons, among them relatives of the writers, after they began shouting: "Down with the

Dictatorship," and other slogans against the regime, witnesses said.

The mourners poured into the street after they were denied their request to have their eight speakers deliver speeches in memory of the writers.

It was the second time in days that

riot police had forcibly broken up a demonstration — on Thursday police dispersed several thousand demonstrators who had gathered to mark the anniversary of the death of former Prime Minister Mohdi Bazargan, a moderate opposition figure who died in 1995.

Non-existent Italian livestock

ROME (AP) — Counting sheep, Italy's agriculture ministry got a wake-up call: Fully 41 per cent of the sheep, goats and bulls claimed by the country's farmers existed only on paper, shepherded only to apply for European Union subsidies. The agriculture ministry announced its discovery Friday after an investigation by forest rangers. The rangers tagged the animals with biodegradable paint to make sure they didn't check any twice in their head counts. The paint foiled farmers' practice of borrowing flocks from neighbours when inspectors were due. Sheep and goats made up the bulk of the imaginary flocks, with only 633,589 identified out of 1,090,713 claimed, the agriculture ministry said.

Fake psychiatrist receives jail term

LEIPZIG (AFP) — A German postal worker who posed for years as a psychiatrist, even appearing as a medical expert in court, was jailed for four years Friday in the eastern city of Leipzig. Gert Uwe Postel, 40, held the job of top doctor at the psychiatric clinic of Zschadras from 1995 to 1997, where he was responsible for prisoners for a year before setting up his own clinic. After presenting fake documents to an employment centre in Berlin-Brandenburg in 1994, Postel was taken on as a court psychology expert before working in a regional insurance centre in Stuttgart.

Frenchman shucks 2,064 oysters in one hour

LYON (AFP) — A man in France has been crowned the world's top oyster shucker after prying open 2,064 shells in an hour, officials at an annual gastronomy convention here said on Friday. Marcel Lesouille of France, 47, set the world record using a four-centimetre-long oyster knife. He outdid his previous best — also a world record — set in 1995 of 1,429 oysters opened in an hour. The champion, whose record will be noted in the Guinness Book of World Records, hopes to open a French school to produce professional oyster shuckers, officials at the convention said.

German child takes trucks for joyride

FRANKFURT (R) — A 13-year-old German boy with a passion for heavy trucks has been stealing 40-tonners and taking them for joyrides around Europe. In his latest excursion this week, Andreas B., son of a lorry driver, triggered an international police hunt after he jumped into a 16-metre truck left unattended, manoeuvred it out of a truck yard, and drove onto a motorway. The trip took him into Holland and back to north-west Germany, where he clipped the wing mirror of a truck during a precarious overtaking manoeuvre on the motorway near Duisburg. Police finally managed to persuade him to stop by contacting him on a mobile phone left in the truck.

People work more and enjoy it less

ANAHEIM (AP) — People work more than they want to. A new study of two-career couples finds that the number of hours they spend on the job has risen substantially in the past two decades. "People are working longer hours, and it's not because they want to," said Martin Clarkberg, a Cornell University sociologist. Clarkberg and other researchers presented their latest findings on the work-family time squeeze Friday at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Both sexes feel stressed by the competing demands of job and home.

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